

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

A WEEKLY DEALING WITH THE DETECTION OF CRIME

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second-Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 32.

Price, Five Cents.



ZIP! BIFF THE KNIFE SHOT THROUGH THE AIR, AND PASSING WITHIN AN EIGHTH OF AN INCH OF WELL'S EAR,
CUT OFF THE ONLY STRAY CURL. - (CHAPTER CXXXVII.)

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Jesse James' Exploits.

By W. B. LAWSON.

CHAPTER CXXXVII.

A DANGEROUS TEST—THE OLD NEGRO.

On a certain day in the summer of 1881 a band of stern-faced men were gathered together in a secluded hollow, near the Missouri River, in Missouri, and not many miles from the Iowa line.

The nearest habitation was an old negro's cabin, nearly a mile away.

The hollow was shut in from view from surrounding plantations by a wild tangle of vines and trees, while a heavy carpeting of soft moss made a comfortable resting-place for the five men who formed the band.

Tethered in a dense thicket near by were five horses, all bearing evidence of recent hard riding.

Four of the men were conversing in low tones.

The fifth, stretched at full length on the grass, with his hat over his eyes, was fast asleep.

Two of the talkers were Frank and Jesse James.

The third, tall, muscular, with a seamed and scarified countenance, and eyes that expressed a cold, relentless ferocity, was Jim Cummings.

The fourth was Ed Miller, a brother of Clegg Miller, who was shot in the Northfield raid in 1876.

A quartet of desperadoes such as America had seldom been cursed with.

The robbery of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad train in July had scattered the band of the notorious James boys, and a project was now under discussion to further weaken the present force by withdrawing two of its members.

"Three of us will go one way, two another," said Jesse James. "Miller will do for me and Frank, for we are likely to pick up Matt Chapman, Andy Ryan and Dick Little near Independence."

And then the outlaw leader went on and unfolded the daring scheme for the robbery of the Chicago and Alton train in a deep cut in the Glendale region near the Missouri Pacific crossing.

Jim Cummings listened intently, but made no remark.

But ever and anon, while Jesse James was talking, he would glance at the form of the sleeping man.

"Now, Jim," said Jesse at last, "I'll come to your racket. The band divides here, as you are aware, in order that we may kill two birds with one stone. The country is getting too hot for us. We must make a big haul as quick as old Nick will let us.

"The train my party intends to hold up will disgorge enough boodle to take us all to California or Mexico, while the haul you and your comrades ought

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to make at the bank will set us up in any line of honest business we may severally choose to adopt.

"The leadership of this bank raid, Jim, lies between you and Polk. I know your plan of attack and his do not agree, but I know also that both of you have been too long with me not to know the value of discipline and obedience when once an affair is under way and life and death hang in the balance."

"You needn't fear on my account, Jess," grunted Jim Cummings. "If Polk makes the riffle I'll stand in and obey his orders, if they lead me plump to the gates of sheol."

"Same here, old hoss," exclaimed a light, cheery voice, and the man who had been sleeping threw his hat from his face and arose quickly to a sitting position.

He was young—not more than twenty-two or three—with a powerfully-built frame and a beardless face that was marked with grit and fearlessness.

Although young in years, he was old in crime.

During the past five years, while either a member of the James' boys band, or occupied in lawless enterprises on his own hook, he had managed to slay over twenty men.

Such was Charles Polk Wells, sometimes called Bloody Polk Wells, but oftener addressed by his outlaw comrades as plain Polk Wells, one of the most daring and ferocious followers of the notorious Frank and Jesse James.

"I'm with you, my gentle tarrier," he continued, with a nod at big Jim Cummings, "and if your plan has to go, together with your leadership, I'll wade knee deep in gore, but what I'll be at your back from first to last."

"That's all right, Polk," said Jesse James, "and, as you're both agreed, we will now decide the question of leadership. Whoever shall prove to be the best man takes command, and carries the thing through."

"What kind of a test will suit—marksmanship, muscle or book larnin'?" queried Cummings, in a sort of growl. "If it's book larnin' you can count me out, for I'd be nowhar o' Polk."

The latter smiled with conscious superiority.

He, Polk, was a scholar, for had he not been through McGuffey's Third Reader, and could he not work in fractions?

"No, it's not a matter of education," said Jesse James, "nor yet muscle, nor the handling of a gun or pistol."

"What, then, is to be the test?" inquired Polk Wells, carelessly.

"It is to be one of nerve and skill."

Jim Cummings drew a breath of relief.

His nerve was of the order of iron.

Nothing had ever phased him, and he would walk

into any danger, no matter how great or terrible, as coolly as if he were walking into a restaurant to get his dinner.

"We haven't had any knife practice for a long time," remarked Frank James. "Suppose, Jess, you let the boys begin with a try at each other."

"You've read my mind, Frank, the same as if it were a book. The knife test was what I was going to propose."

Neither Cummings nor Wells showed by their countenances that the matter was one in which they were particularly interested.

Ed Miller, who was the youngest of the band, glanced at the two candidates for the leadership closely, and then shook his head as if he wondered of what stuff these men were made.

The preliminaries were soon arranged.

Every outlaw present, with the possible exception of Miller, was an expert in the use of the knife.

If not as proficient as the professional juggler they could yet make such a showing in throwing the sharp-edged weapon as would cause the eyes of the average person to open wide in wonder and admiration.

A half-dollar toss-up gave Jim Cummings the privilege of opening the ball.

With a cool, collected mien Polk Wells stepped forward to a large sycamore, just outside of the little hollow, and placed his back firmly against the broad trunk.

He was bare-headed, and his hair, which was worn long, hung down upon his shoulders.

One lock protruded a few inches beyond the ear as he straightened up and braced himself against the tree.

Jesse James pointed to it.

"Take that first, Jim," he said.

The burly desperado drew a bowie-knife from his belt.

Holding it up so that the rays of the sun shone upon the steel and made it glitter like silver, he critically inspected the point and edge.

Frank James paced off fifteen feet.

At that distance from the human target Jim Cummings was to try his skill and Polk Wells' nerve.

The conditions of the test were such that if the knife-wielder on the one hand failed to touch the mark aimed at, or so much as drew blood from the human target, he was then and there to be declared the loser.

On the other hand, should Wells shrink from the ordeal, or through fear or nervousness so alter his position as to cause an accident to himself or prevent Cummings from hitting the target, then he was to be counted out of the game.

When once in position Cummings grasped the handle of his bowie firmly, and, raising it over his

shoulder, began to make it describe a number of swift curves and circles.

"Now," he shouted, and at the same instant Polk Wells' heart stopped beating.

Zip! biff!

The knife shot through the air, and, passing within an eighth of an inch of Wells' ear, cut off the stray curl of hair, and imbedded itself in the bark of the tree.

"Hurrah!" shouted Ed Miller; "score one for Jim."

"That was very neat," calmly remarked Frank James.

Jesse said nothing, but his cold, blue eyes twinkled in satisfaction.

The outlaw leader brought forth from the breast-pocket of his coat a deck of cards.

Selecting the ace of hearts, he handed it to Wells.

"Hold that above your head and against the tree," was the command.

Then to Jim.

"Now, old son, you must split that heart, or out you go."

The burly outlaw's eyes gleamed fiercely, and he shut his lips tightly.

"I'll do it," he muttered under his breath; "I'll do it, or never lift a knife again."

Polk Wells grinned and showed his white teeth.

Once more was the bowie-knife poised high in the air.

Once more it made its curves and circles.

"Ready! Now!"

A breathless hush followed the passage through the air of Jim Cummings' knife.

Then, "He's done it," was the cry of Miller; "hit it plumb in the center."

And so he had.

"Polk's all right!" said Jesse James. "Now, settle the arrangements among yourselves, for you must start this evening for Watson, where you will meet Bill Gartner and Jake Shelford. The four of you ought to do the trick without any trouble. Ten days hence we will meet again in the hollow if we are out of limbo."

Suddenly the party saw an old negro coming toward them.

He saluted the five outlaws respectfully, and then shambled on.

"That old fellow's true blue," said Jesse James; "I don't know him personally, but I'll bet a big dollar that he knows me. Wood Hite has often spoken of him. He used to live in Clay County, but not in my neighborhood."

"What's his name?" queried Polk Wells.

"Old Nicodemus."

"Old Nick, eh? Then he must be a devilish good fellow. I feel that I ought to make his acquaintance."

The time was to come when both Wells and Cummings were to have the liveliest recollections of the aged Ethiopian.

When the five outlaws passed from view of the grassland into the thicket and shrubbery Old Nicodemus began to act in a peculiar manner.

He stopped short in his walk when the band of the dreaded James boys were no longer in sight, and gave utterance to a low chuckle of satisfaction.

"Fooled 'em, sure," he muttered. "Jess never suspected but what I was the genuine old Nick. If he knew that the old darkey passed in his checks a fortnight ago he'd be after my credentials in short order."

The darkey was a cold fraud.

That is, he was a fraud as a colored man.

As a matter of fact he was Burton Braham, a noted Western detective.

Though not yet twenty-five years of age, he had made a reputation for bravery and shrewdness second to none of his brethren in the profession.

"There is some deviltry afoot or the boys would not have rendezvoused in the hollow," he said to himself, as he gazed in the direction of the spot where the outlaws had gone, "and I'm going to find out what it is or know the reason why."

He well knew when he pitted himself against the James boys or their comrades in crime that he took his life in his hands, for the detectives were few, indeed, who had ever succeeded in scoring a point against these notorious and case-hardened desperadoes of the Mississippi Valley.

Some of the bravest man-hunters in the Union—detectives who had been trained under Byrnes and Pinkerton—had tried to break up the band and arrest the leaders, only to disappear forever from the sight and knowledge of the world.

Woe be to the detective then whose identity should become known to the outlaws when engaged in tracking them down.

Death, swift and awful, would certainly follow such a discovery, unless the daring officer of the law should be possessed of almost superhuman strength and cunning.

Burton Braham knew all this, as has been said, and yet he deliberately turned in his course, and hurried rapidly in the trail of the outlaws.

He had reached the edge of the thicket when the sound of horses' hoofs beyond caused him to grit his teeth in rage.

"They have the best of me this time," was his thought, "and I'll probably never strike such a lucky chance again, as I had when I caught sight of the five of 'em up there on the bank of the river."

"Why didn't I steal up on them?"

"I ought to have done it, and piped off their conversation instead of taking the chances of their go-

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ing back to the hollow and staying there a few hours, long enough to accommodate me.

"Accommodate me," he repeated, with a harsh laugh. "No, that's not the kind of accommodation I'm likely to meet at their hands."

"But I'm not going back to the cabin, now I've got so far on my trip. I'm going to inspect their old camp. Maybe I may strike something that may give me a clew to their new game."

He made as little noise as possible, and had reached a point about twenty feet from the edge of the clearing that held the hollow, when the sound of voices in earnest conversation greeted his ears.

The sour, disappointed look on his face immediately gave way to one of delight.

Slowly and carefully he made his way forward until he could see into the open space.

Leaning against the big sycamore were Polk Wells and Jim Cummings.

Jesse and Frank James and Ed Miller had gone.

The two outlaws—late rivals for the leadership of what Jesse James had called the bank racket—were discussing the details of the lawless and desperate venture.

Burton Braham, listening with all his ears, soon learned that Wells and Cummings had in contemplation the robbery of the bank at Riverton, a small town in the southwesternmost county of Iowa, on the line of the Burlington and Missouri River Railway, and about a dozen miles from the Missouri line.

Polk Wells was talking.

"My plan is," said he, "to make a bold dash on the bank in the daytime, say just after the doors are opened, and the first rush is over."

"Rush! There won't be much of a rush in a town of six hundred inhabitants. Maybe old Deacon Smith and Elder Crabapple will rush in with a handful of dimes, but there won't be any kind of a rush that will be likely to interfere with our game."

"No, Jim; I don't think there will. We'll take the bank people by surprise, and there won't be any shooting if things turn out as I expect they will."

"Who cares for the shooting," grumbled Cummings.

"Neither you nor I, Jim. But we're playing for safety this trip, and then for a skip out for Mexico or California."

"Northfield was raided in the daytime, and the boys got it in the back of the neck. I don't see how you kin count on no shooting, Polk, on this little game o' yours."

"There was too much gin aboard the outfit that tackled Northfield," said Polk. "This time—at Riverton—we'll waltz into the work cold sober. We can buy the biggest jag in the country afterward if we feel like it."

The detective lost not a word of the conversation,

and when he left the spot he had the full details of the plan to rob the Riverton bank in his mind.

Here was the chance of his life.

By apprising the sheriff of Fremont County of the intended raid a posse of determined men could be on hand at the moment of the attack, and the two noted outlaws could be easily captured and the James boys' gang broken in twain.

Burton Braham saw the outlaws preparing to mount their horses, and he then hastened to the cabin that the old negro had occupied in life.

He reached the door, opened it, and then started back in wonderment.

For there in the one small room, and seated in the only chair, a rocker, was a young and beautiful woman.

"Good-evening, Uncle Nick," she said, with a smile and in the sweetest of voices.

Burton Braham came within an ace of losing his presence of mind.

But he recovered himself in time to answer in the voice of the old negro.

"Good-ebenin', honey, an' how is yo' bressed se'f dis ebening'?"

CHAPTER CXXXVIII.

A CHALLENGE ACCEPTED.

The girl—she could not have been more than seventeen—was a golden blonde of the purest type, with a captivating mouth and eyes that sparkled saucily.

"I've been waiting for you for more than an hour, Uncle Nick," she said, with a pouting air. "Where in the name of goodness have you been?"

The disguised detective, instead of answering her, asked a question himself:

"Whar did yo' cum from, honey?"

"Where did I come from? Why, from Clay County, of course; from the old home. It can't be that you have forgotten me, Uncle Nick, and we hav ing such romps together only two months ago."

Burton Braham was on the point of betraying himself as the fair girl ceased speaking, but he checked himself quickly as the thought obtruded itself that this Missourian beauty might be related to the Jamie boys.

He must be quite sure that she could be trusted with his secret before he disclosed himself to her as a white man.

Therefore he answered her in this wise:

"I'se gittin' old, missee, and I'se done los' som ob my recollectifier. I knows yo' face, suah, ne body couldn't neber fo'git a lubly face like yo' honey; but I 'clar' to goodness dat I cyan't remember none o' yo' folks. Lem me see. Dar we de Jameses and ole Miss Samuels, the—"

He paused and looked at her questioningly.

"Ugh!" with a shudder of repulsion. "Don't me

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tion those horrid creatures, uncle. I know you've pretended to be friends with some members of Frank and Jesse's band, but that was for a purpose. I know just what that purpose was, too, do you know that?" archly.

The pseudo Uncle Nicodemus showed the whites of his eyes, and professed the greatest astonishment.

"You know w'at dat puppus was, missee—missee, 'clar' if I ain't done fo'git yo' name."

"Miss Marcia is my name—Marcia Colving. Why, you have lost your memory, indeed."

"Clean runned away wid itself, Miss Marshy. Well, as I was a sayin', you know er co'se w'at dat puppus was. En dat puppus was—w'at?"

He regarded her with a look of innocent cunning. The girl laughed merrily.

Never a thought of deception on the part of the man before her entered her young and unsophisticated mind.

"That purpose," she said, gravely, her mood changing in a moment, "was to protect my uncle, Colonel Herring."

"How could dis ole niggah perteck Kunnel Herring by stan'in' in wid de fren's ob de James boys?"

"You ask that? Why, you haven't forgotten, have you?—forgotten that Colonel Herring owes his life to your fidelity and shrewdness? that to-day Polk Wells would be in possession of uncle's small fortune but for your intervention?"

Burton Braham had great difficulty in keeping up his assumed character when Marcia Colving made this most interesting revelation.

Polk Wells was concerned in the affair, was he?

"I will pump her thoroughly, and then I will tell her who I am," was his conclusion.

But, after a quiet chuckle, he said, aloud:

"I don' fo'git w'at I done, honey, but I wants ter know ef you got de straight ob de mattah."

"You want me to tell the whole story, do you? Oh, Uncle Nick! It's the praise you are after, and not the story."

"Nebber min' de praise; gimme de story."

"Well, then, if you must be informed of what ought to be perfectly clear to your understanding but which must have escaped your recollection, unless," looking at him archly, "you are deceiving me for some bad purpose, I will say, Uncle Nick, that you pretended to be a good friend of Wood Hite, and assisted in his escape from the Liberty jail on condition that he would let Colonel Herring alone."

"Was he gwine ter hurt de kunnel?"

"You know he was, or at least you ought to know. My uncle had informed the officers against Hite and Andy Ryan, and Hite had sworn to get even. But he kept away from uncle after you got him out of jail."

"Yes, yes, honey, ob co'se he did. Wood Hite

was a man ob his word. But 'bout dis yer Poke Wells—wat did Poke do?"

"Uncle had sold a lot of cotton from his Mississippi plantation, and with the money in bank notes, amounting to over fifteen thousand dollars, had started on horseback from the steamer landing across the country to Liberty. Polk Wells learned of the sale, and of uncle's intentions, and he concocted a scheme to rob him. And the scheme would have succeeded if you, good, brave, cunning Uncle Nick, had not discovered what was in the wind, and warned Colonel Herring in time."

"Did ole Nick do dat, foh a fack?"

"He did, and Poke Wells does not know to this day that it was your agency which prevented the robbery. I don't believe he knows you at all, does he, uncle?"

"No, honey; me an' Polk Wells am entiah strangahs to one anudder. He wouldn't know me f'om ole Adam, I specs."

"And now, Uncle Nick," said Marcia, as she leaned forward and patted the disguised detective on the head—Braham said afterward that he would certainly have sunk through the floor in very shame if the delicious sensations that swept through him had not buoyed him up and made him reckless of consequences—"now, I will tell you why I am here to-day."

She took her small, soft and shapely hand from his head, and then the detective ventured to look up at her.

"Uncle will leave for New Orleans to-morrow, and while he is gone there will be no one at the old homestead but Aunt Polly, her daughter and myself, unless you will consent to stay with us until he returns."

"Ob co'se I will," exclaimed the false darkey, impulsively, "ob co'se I will, Miss Marshy. Did de kunnel ax you to come an' see me 'bout gwine down to Liberty?"

"Yes. He has the highest opinion of your capacity, Uncle Nick. He will not fear any raid by the James boys, or any other band, while you are there."

At this moment a thought came to Braham which made him knit his brows in perplexity.

The robbery of the Riverton bank had been planned for three days hence.

If he went with this lovely Missourian to her uncle's place near Liberty he would not be able to assist in the arrest of the robbers.

All he could do in the event of his accompanying Miss Colving to her home would be to write to the sheriff of Fremont County, warning him of the purposed raid on the Riverton bank.

"How long will your uncle be gone?" he asked, in the vague hope that he might be able, as the saying is, to kill two birds with one stone.

"Two weeks."

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As the words left the fair girl's lips steps were heard outside.

Burton Braham, who had been in a kneeling position, straightened up quickly and faced the door.

As he did so Polk Wells and Jim Cummings appeared at the threshold.

The moment was a critical one, but Braham retained his coolness and nerve.

Without paying the slightest attention to the false Uncle Nick, the two outlaws fixed their gaze upon the girl.

Her lips curled in cold disdain when her eyes fell on big Jim Cummings, but a slight shudder passed over her when she looked at his companion.

"You didn't know I was in these parts, I reckon, Miss Marcia?" said Polk Wells, with a cool grin.

"No, I did not," she replied, shortly.

Then she deliberately turned her back to the pair of desperadoes.

"Uncle Nick," she called out, "my horse is at the back. If yours is here we will start now."

"Start? That means home, doesn't it?"

Polk Wells was again the speaker.

The girl paid no attention to him, but made her way to the back door of the cabin.

This door opened into a little shed inclosed on three sides.

In this shed were two horses, one belonging to Miss Colving, the other to the detective.

As the girl was about to step from the cabin into the shed Polk Wells called out, roughly:

"Hold on a bit, Miss Impertinence, I've got a crow to pick with you about the way you treated me in Liberty last summer."

The false Uncle Nick now spoke up for the first time since the advent of the outlaws.

"Don't bodder wid de po' girl, Mistah Man. She's gwine get back home dis ebenin', and she'll hab ter ride like de berry debbel ter git to de railway station, kase it's nigh on ter sundown a'ready."

"Tie up your clapper, old man," Jim Cummings replied, harshly, "or you'll get a crack in the jaw that'll make you see stars."

Marcia Colving stepped into the shed.

"I reckon you won't go home this evening, not if I know myself," remarked Polk Wells, and upon the words he started across the room to reach the young girl.

But Burton Braham, standing erect, and no longer seemingly old and decrepit, barred his progress.

"Stand back, you hound!" he cried out, sternly, in his natural tones, "or I'll blow the top of your miserable head off."

A revolver cocked, and pointed straight at the outlaw's forehead, emphasized the command.

"A detective!" hissed Jim Cummings, who was at Polk Wells' side when Braham spoke. "Then, take that for keeps!"

Two reports rang out almost simultaneously, and were quickly followed by a third.

Each one of the three determined men had fired.

But two of the bullets were meant for the false Uncle Nick, and both had sped unerringly to the mark.

The detective was lying prostrate on the floor when the smoke cleared away, while Jim Cummings, with a ball in his shoulder, stood over the body with a fiendish grin on his ugly countenance.

He was stooping down to get a closer look into the face of his victim, when a cry from his companion caused him to straighten up with a start.

Polk Wells, half way to the back door, stood gazing ahead of him at something that astonished him greatly.

Jim Cummings' eyes also opened widely as he took in the full importance of the scene, and for a moment not a move made he, not a word left his lips.

When the shots were fired Marcia Colving was at her horse's side, and within a few feet of a corner where stood a rifle belonging to the detective.

Without a moment's hesitation, though her heart was beating violently, she seized the weapon, cocked it, and then hurried to the doorway.

It was her position on the threshold, with the trusty rifle at her shoulder, and her eyes gleaming with desperate resolve, that had induced Polk Wells to stop on his way to the shed and utter the ejaculation which had startled Jim Cummings.

The two desperadoes, ferocious and daring though they were, were so taken aback at the girl's promptitude and courage that they could do nothing for a time but stare at her in stupefied amazement.

Miss Colving spoke first, and her voice vibrated with deadly earnestness:

"Throw down your pistols, both of you, and then leave this cabin. Quick, or I'll shoot."

The muzzle of the rifle was on a line with Polk Wells' forehead.

He looked into the barrel, saw death written there in capital letters, and might have weakened if he had been anybody else but Polk Wells.

But, being Polk Wells, who had faced the king of terrors in countless shapes since he had arrived at man's estate, and who knew not the meaning of the word fear, he cried out, sneeringly:

"Shoot and be hanged."

She hesitated.

"Your bluff won't work, my fine lady," said Jim Cummings, who had got over his astonishment, "so the sooner you lower that gun the better chance you'll have of getting home to your pappy tonight."

The burly outlaw's remarks were unheeded, for at that moment the girl's eyes were turned on the

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motionless and bleeding form of the person she had taken for Uncle Nicodemus.

She now knew that she had been imposed upon, but there was no anger in her heart at the deception, for Braham's actions had spoken stronger than words of his friendship for her, and his opposition to the designs of her enemies.

Watching his chance, Polk Wells sprang forward when her eyes were downcast and while her thoughts were turned in a new channel, and, seizing the rifle by the barrel, turned it quickly so that the muzzle pointed upward.

On the instant of this action, the weapon was discharged, and the bullet lodged in the ceiling.

"Now I've got you, Miss Spitfire," Polk Wells cried out, in savage triumph, at the same time catching the trembling girl about the waist.

In the extremity of her terror and despair she gave utterance to a piercing scream.

Burton Braham's body began to quiver.

Jim Cummings, with his eyes on his comrade in evil, exclaimed, with an oath:

"Shut her wind off, or she'll bring the whole country down on us!"

The words of the big desperado had the effect of bringing out another and a louder and shriller scream than the first.

If she could alarm the country in that way it was her business to do it.

"Curse you, take that!" snarled Cummings, and, on the brutal impulse of the moment, he struck the girl across the mouth with his open hand.

The next moment something happened of a most astonishing character.

The seemingly dead or fatally wounded detective sprang to his feet, and with one blow delivered with sledge-hammer force and precision and straight from the shoulder, sent Jim Cummings to the floor.

His head struck the boards with such force as for the time to knock all the sense and strength out of him.

Polk Wells withdrew his arm from about the person of Miss Colving and went for his revolver.

But his wrist was seized by the courageous girl before he could execute his murderous intention.

"I am ready for him, pistol or no pistol," cried the disguised detective, whose blood was up, and whose eyes were gleaming fiercely. "Don't hinder his movements, please. Let him shoot if he wants."

The sneering tone in which the words were uttered stung the Missourian outlaw to the quick.

Wrenching himself from Miss Colving's grasp, he flung his pistol to the floor.

The knife worn at his belt followed suit.

Then he held up his hands above his head.

"There," he cried, hotly, "I am unarmed. Do you want to fight with these?"

He doubled up his fists and struck a pugilistic attitude.

Burton cast caution to the winds upon the moment.

Down on the floor went all the weapons he had upon his person.

"Keep your eye upon those articles, Miss Colving," was his quiet remark, "while I show this scoundrel that I am ready to meet him on any ground he may choose to select."

Off went his negro wig and baggy coat.

A handkerchief from his pocket quickly removed the grease paint from his face and hands.

A young man, with close-cropped brown hair, a smooth, handsome face, and dark, searching eyes, and a powerful physique, stood in the place of the false Nicodemus.

The combatants were about to step outside and have their "go" in the open air, when Braham, pointing to the still unconscious figure of Jim Cummings, said:

"How about that duffer? Won't he interfere, and play a trick on me?"

"No," said Marcia, with firm lips, "not while I am here."

She blushed when the handsome detective gave her a look in which admiration was blended with confidence, and, taking the two pistols from the floor, sat down within a few feet of the prostrate villain, and watched for the moment when he should recover his senses.

CHAPTER CXXXIX.

A DEED OF DARKNESS.

It may seem surprising to the reader that Burton Braham should so soon display his usual vigor, after being laid low by the pistol bullets of his enemies.

It is true that both shots struck the mark aimed at.

But it is also true that the detective's luck was never more emphatically displayed than on this occasion.

The bullet fired from Polk Wells' revolver plowed a ridge in his scalp, without fracturing the skull, just over the right temple.

The shock from this trifling wound induced a short period of insensibility.

The other bullet discharged by Jim Cummings would have penetrated his heart and finished his earthly career then and there had not his watch case intervened to save him.

As it was, he was about as good as new when he stepped out of the cabin to try fistic conclusions with the most muscular and athletic member of the James boys' band of outlaws.

It was twilight, and in half-an-hour it would be dark.

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As the combat promised to be of the go-as-you-please sort, no time was wasted in preliminaries.

The two men, as they stood facing each other, seemed to be about evenly matched physically.

Both were tall, both were built, as the saying is, "from the ground up," and both were men of indomitable nerve.

Wells led off with a right-hander, aimed at the detective's neck.

It never reached its mark, for it was parried scientifically, and a left-hander was sent in that, catching Wells under the jaw, fairly lifted him off his feet.

Just about that time the bold outlaw made an unpleasant discovery.

Burton Braham was a more skillful and scientific fighter than he.

And at the same time the honors were easy in the matter of pure strength.

Therefore, if the banner of victory was to float over the head of Polk Wells that closely-pressed individual would have to resort to some trick not in the schedule of Hoyle, the Marquis of Queensbury or the London prize ring.

So, at the first opportunity, when both had drawn apart for a moment's rest, he made a dash forward and struck his antagonist an unexpected and vicious blow "below the belt," or, to be more explicit, in the pit of the stomach.

The blow was meant to wind Braham, and it did.

It nearly doubled him up, and for the moment he was as weak as the proverbial cat.

But he did not fall over, for all his weakness.

Quick to take a still meaner advantage of the detective, Wells followed up his "foul" by a blow that would have caught Braham square between the eyes, if he had occupied the position to receive the blow that the treacherous outlaw had calculated on.

But Braham did not accommodate his adversary in this second move to attain the championship.

He did not see Wells square off to let drive the forehead staggerer, but he divined that such an act was next on the programme.

Therefore, when the outlaw's knotted fist went forth charged with murderous force, Braham's head was beyond the line of danger.

And at this stage of the proceedings the detective's wind returned.

He straightened up quickly, upon escaping the blow aimed at his head, and his dukes came into play in a manner that caused Wells to see more stars than ever the heavens afforded.

The enraged detective caromed on the outlaw's nose, neck, mouth and eyes, and he was rapidly reducing Wells' physiognomy to a pulp, when something struck him on the side of the head and made him fall like a log upon the grass.

The something was the stock of a rifle, and Jim Cummings had wielded it.

There had been no sound from the cabin since the fight outside had commenced.

What then had happened to bring Cummings safely past those weapons of death held in the hands of brave Miss Colving?

And why was she so silent?

To answer these questions it will be necessary to return to the moment when Polk Wells and Burton Braham left the little room on their pugilistic mission.

At that moment Jim Cummings raised his head from the floor, and, leaning on his elbow, he gazed with a ferocious scowl on his sin-lined countenance at the beautiful girl who was sitting on guard over him.

She expected him to speak, but he never opened his mouth.

All he could do was to glare at her.

Besides, there was nothing to say in the way of explanation, for the girl's look and position, coupled with the absence of the detective and Polk Wells, told the whole story.

He was, in effect, a prisoner, and this chit of a girl was his jailer.

He raged inwardly for a moment, and then set his evil wits to work to circumvent her.

One thing gave him confidence in his ability to get the better of his jailor.

He was armed.

In removing the two pistols from the floor where they had been cast by the two combatants outside she had given no thought to the weapons which the villain at her feet might carry about his person.

Jim Cummings felt for his knife, but as he drew it from his belt the girl's fierce whisper made him pause in his design.

"Drop it, or I'll fire!"

With a half-audible curse, he let his hand fall.

His jaw fell at the same time.

At this juncture the heavy breathing of the fighting men outside, with the frequent alternations of a plunk! that spoke of a blow sent from the shoulder with the desired effect, caused Marcia to turn her eyes to the door.

A slight noise behind her just then attracted Jim Cummings' attention.

He raised his head, and looked toward the door opening into the shed, and there on the threshold he saw a sight that made his heart pulsate in wicked joy.

A short, thick-set man, with a stubby black beard, swarthy face, and short curly hair, stood winking at the outlaw significantly.

Cummings inclined his head toward the girl, who all unconscious of this dumb by-play, was listening with beating heart to the sounds of the struggle in the open air.

Burton Braham had instinctively dodged the blow

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meant to take him between the eyes and lay him out like a slain bullock, and was about to begin his terrific onslaught on his less scientific adversary, when a large, coarse hand was pressed roughly over Miss Colving's mouth, and she was lifted quickly from her chair and carried to the shed.

With the one whisper, "Hold her till I come back, or something happens," Jim Cummings left the man who had so opportunely come to his assistance, and hurried out of doors.

It was almost dark, but he could see the two combatants, and he could see also that his confederate in arms was getting the worst of the encounter.

He had not neglected to bring his rifle when he rushed out, and, clubbing it, he seized the first convenient opportunity to deal the detective a blow on the head that sent him to grass.

Before Braham could recover himself, he was bound hand and foot.

The tables had been turned, and in a most unexpected manner.

Miss Colving was a prisoner, and her protector, who had foolishly undertaken to settle his account with Polk Wells after the manner of a prize fighter, was in the most dangerous situation of his life.

"What shall we do with this hound of a detective?" queried the man whose swollen and bloody face bore conspicuous evidence of Braham's fistic work.

"Dump him into the river," said Cummings.

This suggestion pleased Wells immensely.

The two outlaws at once proceeded to carry it into effect.

The short, dark-featured man who had overcome Miss Colving was known to the James boys as Jingo Pitts.

He was not a regular member of the band, but he had assisted in several plundering raids, and was regarded as an unscrupulous wretch, one who would hesitate at no crime, however heinous, if promises of good pay were held out.

When not engaged in lawless enterprises, he occupied himself in sampling the poorest kinds of liquors that the State of Missouri held within her borders.

"I'm out for stuff," he said to Jim Cummings, when the latter went into the shed to have a talk with Pitts after the manner of the detective's quietus had been decided upon, "and that's why you see me here."

"Who told you we were in these parts?"

"Bill Gartner."

"Where did you see him, and when?"

"I saw him at Watson this forenoon. Jake Sheldford was with him, and they were looking out for you and Polk."

"Why didn't they come on with you to this place?"

"Because they had had orders from Jess to wait in

town for your coming. I let out for the hollow so's to have a private confab with you boys afore you started to meet Bill and Jake."

"Did they tell you what was in the wind?"

"No; never a syllable."

"Would you like to get in and make a few dollars?"

"Didn't I tell you I was out for stuff? Of course I would. Grass is terrible short up my way, and if I can see a right smart chance of fingering some bullion I'm your man, and no objections made to the character of the work."

"I'll see if I can't make a trade with you, Jingo. Stay with the girl for half-an-hour more while Polk and I attend to a leetle private business outside, and then I'm with you."

Marcia Colving lay stretched on the floor of the shed while the above conversation was taking place.

Jingo Pitts had taken occasion while alone with the girl to treat her as her detective friend had been treated, with the brutal addition of gagging her.

Jim Cummings could not see the face of the girl owing to the dim light, but he chuckled to himself as he turned his eyes toward her form.

Darkness had set in before the two outlaws, carrying the body of the helpless detective, reached the river bank.

But the moon showed itself above the horizon before they were ready to commence operations, and its silvery rays, shining through the branches of the trees, lighted up the water in patches.

A spot was selected for the commission of the murderous deed where the bank rose up sheer out of the deep water, and where the moon's light enabled them to see about them.

The cords were tightened about the victim's wrists and ankles, and then Jim Cummings, lifting the body with the utmost ease, held it a moment poised over the brink of the watery abyss.

"Now, Polk," he cried out, in malicious triumph; "out with your popper and take a shot at him as he goes down. Ready! plunk!"

He dropped the heavy human burden, and it went down swiftly toward the cold, dark, rushing waters of the great river.

But before the body reached the water Polk Wells' pistol cracked, once, twice, and a groan of agony burst from the lips of the victim. The next instant the form of the detective disappeared from view.

The two assassins watched the circling ripples until they had widened and broadened, and finally became lost in the darkness beyond the space of moonlight.

Then, without a word, they walked back to the cabin.

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CHAPTER CXL.

A QUESTION ANSWERED.

Colonel Alpheus Herring arose from his comfortable bed in his old-fashioned house near Liberty on the morning after the events narrated in the last chapter in a state of mind that was far from comfortable.

His niece had promised to return by the late train the night before, after having transacted her business with Uncle Nicodemus.

She had not returned, nor had she sent any message explaining her absence.

The failure of Marcia to make the trip in the time agreed upon was annoying to the colonel, for the reason that he had made his arrangements to leave for New Orleans that morning to attend to business involving thousands of dollars.

He did not become alarmed at her non-appearance—for she was a girl of pluck and resource, and under ordinary circumstances abundantly able to take care of herself—until Aunt Polly, the colored housekeeper, came to him as he was pacing up and down the veranda.

She had a letter in her hand, and the spectacles that had slipped down on her nose gave presumptive evidence that she had been reading it.

"Did yo' say, Mars Herring," she began—she had served him in ante-bellum days, and still called him master—"dat Miss Marshy done gone up yer ter see ole Nicodemus?"

"Yes?"—regarding her curiously—"that is what I said."

The old colored woman shook her head.

"Pears ter me, Mars Herring, dat she done gone on a fool's yerrand."

"Why so, auntie?"

"Becase dar isn't no Nicodemus fo' her ter see, not on top o' dis yer yearth, Mars Herring."

"What do you mean?"

"Jes' dis, sah: ole Nicodemus done died and was buried two weeks ago."

"Dead and buried," ejaculated the colonel, in amazement. "How do you know that?"

"Dis yer lettah, Mars Herring, tells de whole troof. Read it, sah. It was sent to Chloe, dat good-for-nuffin chile of mine, by dat fool niggah ob a Mose Washington wat libs up to Rockport, in Atchison County."

Colonel Herring took the letter, and read it carefully.

It was written in a schoolboy hand, and, besides imparting the information relating to the death of Uncle Nicodemus, contained the following bit of news that made the colonel turn pale with apprehension:

Who do you think I saw last night, Chloe? Who but the bad white man that bothered Miss Marcia so down in Liberty not

long ago. Who but Polk Wells, Jesse James' comrade, and the worst man to fool with of his inches in Missouri. He was riding toward the river, and I hope he fell into it and got drowned.

The letter was dated the day before.

Polk Wells, the robber, who had planned to steal his—the colonel's—cotton money, who was a rejected suitor for Marcia Colving's hand—he, the outlaw and enemy of both uncle and niece—was in the neighborhood of the old darkey's cabin the night before Marcia's arrival there.

And might he not have been occupying the cabin—the old negro being dead and out of the way—when Marcia arrived?

The thought of such a dreadful possibility was torture to the colonel, and he resolved, unless good tidings of his niece should come within an hour, to take the next train for Atchison County.

His New Orleans business was dismissed from his mind, and all other concerns were swallowed up in the one purpose to find his niece.

An hour passed away, and no word came to the anxious uncle of the missing girl.

The train for the north that left Liberty shortly before noon had Colonel Herring as a passenger.

The afternoon was about half-spent as he rode out of Rockport on the back of the fastest nag that the town's main livery stable could boast of.

For a part of the way to the cabin of the defunct Uncle Nicodemus he followed the Watson road.

Then, at a certain point, he branched off and followed a pathway, which soon brought him to the place that had been the property of Uncle Nicodemus.

On the threshold stood Burton Braham, the detective.

CHAPTER CXLI.

A TERRIBLE STRUGGLE IN THE WATER.

Burton Braham made up his mind that his last moment on earth had arrived when Jim Cummings raised his body high in the air to let it drop into the deep waters of the Missouri.

But the detective's time to die had not yet come.

A change in Polk Wells' murderous programme was suddenly made, and by that redoubtable desperado himself, when he fired the pistol shots at the descending body of his victim.

One of the bullets struck Braham in the fleshy part of the arm, inflicting a slight wound, that afterward gave him but little trouble.

The other bullet severed the cord that bound the detective's wrists, so that when he sunk into the water his hands were free.

His delight may be imagined when the discovery was made that his enemy had unwittingly given him a new lease of life.

He had not been disarmed of his knife, and he

had freed his ankles before he rose to the surface of the water.

But he was wise enough not to show his head in the immediate vicinity of the spot where he had sunk, so he swam under water until he had got beyond the patch of moonlight where the ripples could be seen, and then slowly rose to the surface.

The tramping of feet on the bank above him denoted that the two outlaws were leaving the place.

Braham was one of the best swimmers the West has ever produced, and he rather enjoyed the swim down the river in search of a point where the banks would permit of an easy landing.

At last the moonlight showed him a spot favorable for his purpose, and he put forth rapid strokes to reach it. In another moment he had scrambled up the bank.

It was in the early fall, and the night was warm, and after wringing the water out of his clothes he felt quite comfortable.

He approached the cabin with caution, but soon discovered that no one was there.

The outlaws had gone, and with them the beautiful niece of Colonel Herring.

Where had they taken her? And what were their designs?

Burton Braham groaned as he asked these questions of himself, for he knew he could make no intelligent move in search of her until daylight came.

Another circumstance gave him cause for both anxiety and annoyance.

His horse was gone.

It was a sorrel that he prized highly on account of its spirit, intelligence, and docility.

Without this faithful animal, or any sort of substitute—the cabin was in an unsettled part of the country—he must begin his search on foot.

But it was no use to cry over spilled milk, as it were, so Braham tried to make the best of the situation.

That night he slept at the cabin, but he was up and ready for action at the break of day.

He started off through the fields, following the only trail that was clearly defined—that which led to the hollow where the James boys and their confederates had held their meeting the day before.

In the hollow he picked up a lady's glove.

Its small size and the faint odor of heliotrope which clung to it convinced him that it belonged to Miss Colving.

But as a clew to her whereabouts it was valueless.

All that it proved was that its fair owner had been forcibly carried away by two of the most notorious desperadoes in Missouri.

Braham followed the trail beyond the hollow until it merged into the main road leading to Watson.

In the hope that he might learn something in the town, and also for the purpose of notifying the lead-

ing peace officers there of the contemplated raid on the Riverton bank, he hurried forward in its direction.

He had not traversed more than a quarter of the distance when he gave a cry of delight.

Tied to a tree by the roadside was Napo, his faithful sorrel.

As soon as he saw the animal he rightly conjectured what its presence there meant.

The outlaws knew that Napo was well known throughout the State, and that its possession might bring them into trouble at a time when they were anxious to avoid it.

Therefore they had left it in the road for the first comer to carry off.

The horse gave a loud whinny of joy when his master came up, and went off at a rattling pace when Braham sprang into the saddle.

But the detective did not enter Watson as he intended.

Before he reached the town he met a horseman whom he knew.

It was Jingo Pitts, the ally of Wells and Cummings, the man who had seized Colonel Herring's niece in the old negro's cabin.

Braham knew him for a double-dyed scoundrel, a wretch who would betray his best friend for money.

He had served the detective on several occasions.

His treachery to the outlaws who trusted him had, however, never been suspected, so shrewdly had the fellow played his game.

He started as if he had seen a ghost when he rode up close enough to catch a glimpse of Braham's face.

This exhibition of amazement meant something, and the detective, who was not slow-witted, quickly arrived at the conclusion that Pitts had been informed of his murder by the two villains who had cast him into the river.

"Thought I was food for the fishes, eh?" said Braham, sternly.

"No, no, that is—why, what do you mean, anyhow?"

Pitts had quickly recovered his composure.

"I mean that you have been with Polk Wells and Jim Cummings lately, and they have told you what happened last night. Come, it's no use to deny it, Jingo."

"Well, then," said the fellow, as a curious look came into his beady eyes, "I don't deny it. They told me you fell in the river by accident, and was drowned before they could reach you."

Braham smiled.

Jingo Pitts smiled in return.

"How's your bank account?" the traitorous rascal observed, after a pause.

"Which means, I suppose, that if I want your assistance I will have to pay for it."

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"You've hit the bull's-eye, as you always do, cap'n. But that's all right, ain't it. I do your work, I run the risk of getting my wind shut off, and you whack up the boodle for it. I have never played you for a sucker yet, have I?"

"No, for I wouldn't allow it, Jingo. See here," spoke the detective, earnestly, "I do want your assistance, and if you give it there's big money in it for you."

"Name the sum."

"How would a thousand suit you?"

"It strikes me where I live—in the dead center of my deepest affections. A thousand dollars! Tell me what I must do short of breaking my neck to earn it."

"You must trust yourself under my leadership for one week."

"Is that all? Issue your orders, cap'n."

Braham believed he could rely on Pitts when the matter of the reward had been settled satisfactorily, judging by his experience hitherto with the man.

"A few questions first. Where is Miss Colving?"

"Ah!" grinned Pitts, "I see you are posted. No sort of use in trying to humbug you."

"No sort of use, indeed."

"Miss Colving, cap'n, is staying with a relative of Polk Wells in a little house 'bout a mile from the nigger's cabin, where we found her. That is, she stayed there last night. Where she may be this blessed minute I don't know, nor I can't guess."

"But you can reckon, can't you?"

"Nary. I can neither reckon nor guess. But I can do better; I can find out just where she is."

"Then find out at once."

"'Twon't do to take you along, cap'n, until I locate her; 'twon't do at all. You go on somewhere or other to a place where I can meet you this afternoon, and I'll start right out to hunt Miss Marshy up."

"I will meet you at the negro's cabin," said Braham, "and whether you find her or not you must report to me there not later than four o'clock."

"All right, cap'n."

Pitts was about to ride on when the detective stopped him.

"I have not done with you yet," he said. "I desire to know what happened at the cabin last night after I was laid out."

"The girl was put on a horse, and taken to the house I spoke about."

"Who took her there?"

"I did."

"What! Were you at the cabin when the fight was going on between Wells and myself?"

"Yes."

"Then why didn't you interfere when you saw that I was being carried to my death?" said Braham, indignantly.

"Why didn't I? Because I am not a blanked fool."

What good could I have done to step in? One against two, and the two hardest nuts to crack this side of the Rockies. Why, cap'n, if I had put in my oar they'd have laid me out quicker'n a mule can flick his hoof."

The detective said no more on that point.

"Besides, cap'n," the rascal went on, "I was working for another firm that night. You weren't in it, as far as I was concerned."

"No, I see I wasn't," Braham grunted.

Then he said:

"You took the girl to this house. What did you do next?"

"I went on to Watson to meet Wells and Cummings."

"And did you meet them?"

"Sure enough, and I met some other fellows, too, that you ought to have an interest in."

"Who are they?"

"Jake Shelford and Bill Gartner."

"What are those hustlers doing in Watson?"

The detective was well aware, from his eavesdropping in the hollow, what was the nature of the business that had brought Gartner and Shelford to Watson, but he affected ignorance for the purpose of further testing the honesty of Pitts' professions.

"They came in to keep an appointment."

"Made with whom?"

"Wells and Cummings."

"Were you present when the meeting between the four men took place?"

"I was, cap'n, for you see I'd been let into the snap by the boys last night."

"What is the snap?"

"There is no snap now, but the snap was to rob the Riverton bank up in Fremont County, Iowa."

"Do you mean to say, Jingo, that the plan is off? That Wells and Cummings have flunked?"

Pitts looked oddly at Braham for a moment. Then he broke into a cackling laugh.

"Well, if you ain't an innocent, then I don't want a cent! Here you've been pumping me for facts that you had already scooped in. Shoot me for a skunk, but you're a cool one, cap'n."

"Never mind my coolness, but answer my question."

"Well, then, the robbery won't come off."

"What has occurred to interfere with the programme?"

"Two things. Cummings and Wells have split, and Wells has got the notion into his head that you were onto the job before you met the boys, and had posted the sheriff of Fremont County, or some of the Atchison officers."

"That's a mistake. I have posted no one, and I never learned of the projected raid until last night."

This frank admission on the part of the detective made Pitts' eyes twinkle curiously.

The time came when Burton Braham had reason to regret that he had been so outspoken on this occasion.

"All the same," continued the dark-featured rascal, "the boys have dropped the snap, and it won't go."

"What about Cummings? You said he had split with Wells."

"So he has. You see, their plans did not agree, and, besides, Jim is jealous of Jesse James, and he thinks Jess has gone off on an expedition that promises more boodle than this Riverton layout."

"And has Cummings left Wells?"

"Yes, left him this morning, and started off to join Jess and Frank near Independence."

"What does Wells propose to do?"

"Oh, he's stuck on this gal we run in last night, and he's planned to stay around this region for a while and put in his time courting."

Braham did not know whether to feel glad or sorry when he heard that the Riverton bank robbery was off.

He had hoped to assist in the capture of the entire band of raiders, and now all he could do would be to camp on Polk Wells' trail until he had run him down for abduction and attempted murder.

But first he must find Marcia Colving and restore her to her uncle.

After leaving Pitts, Braham turned back, and rode to the cabin where he had passed the night, intending to remain there in concealment, until his hired emissary should put in an appearance with news of the abducted girl.

Nothing happened to disturb his privacy until the arrival of Colonel Herring.

Before his coming he had had time for a thorough and cool consideration of the case upon which he had entered.

It was possible that Jingo Pitts was playing him false; that the fellow had lied to him about the girl and also in relinquishment of the bank robbery scheme.

And yet it would be money in Pitts' pocket to keep faith with Braham, for the latter was a man of his word, and the thousand dollars if honestly earned would be paid over even if it had to come out of the detective's private funds.

Besides, it was quite probable that Cummings had left Wells to join Jesse James.

It was common talk in the country that Jim aspired to the command of the band, and that, though no quarrel beyond words had ever taken place between the two outlaws, Jim hated Jesse deep down in his heart, and so hating him did not trust him.

What more likely, then, than that Cummings had gone to join Jesse James in order to share in a scheme far richer than that promised by the River-

ton bank robbery, and which Jesse had arranged to carry through without Cummings' assistance?

Well, time would soon tell whether Pitts had lied or not.

It was while Braham was pondering the matter that Colonel Herring's voice broke upon his ear.

"I beg pardon," spoke Colonel Herring, who had hurried into the cabin as soon as he had dismounted. "Where, sir, is my niece?"

"Your niece? Ah, yes. You are Colonel Herring."

"Yes, sir. Now, where is she?"

The manner of Marcia's uncle was almost fierce.

He had no reason to suspect evil of the young man he had found in possession of the old negro's cabin, and yet his niece's absence made him for the moment unmindful of the proprieties.

"She is not far from this place," Braham answered, calmly. "In a short time I hope to give her to you safe and sound."

Colonel Herring was about to ask an explanation when Jingo Pitts rode up to the door.

His horse was covered with foam, and his face was flushed with excitement.

"Did you find her?" asked Braham, eagerly, before the fellow had fairly brought his horse to a standstill.

"Yes, I found her."

"It's all right, colonel," said the detective to Marcia's uncle. "This man has been searching for your niece, and you heard what he said. He has found her."

Jingo Pitts smiled queerly as he dismounted and tethered his horse to a sapling near the door.

CHAPTER CXLII.

THE OUTLAW SHOOTS TO KILL.

In the presence of Braham and Colonel Herring Jingo Pitts told the story of his search for Marcia Colving.

"When I got to the house of Polk's greatuncle or grandcousin, or what not, no one showed up but an old moke, and all the information he could give was that the girl had been taken away this morning in the direction of the river.

"I suspicioned in a second what the destination was, and I lit out for it at once.

"It was an island in the river, a small one, and completely covered with big cottonwoods, and it had been used many times by the boys as a hiding-place.

"I found I was right when I got to the river, for who should be returning from the island in a dug-out but Jute Payne, this relation of Polk's. He's an old cuss, and is all doubled up with rheumatiz, and

it's a wonder how he managed to mosey over to the island from his house.

"I waited till he had tied the boat and was starting up the bank before I hailed him. He and I are old cronies, and he opened up at once."

"Is my niece on that island now?" asked Colonel Herring, impatiently.

"I reckon she is, sir."

"Who is with her?"

"A deaf and dumb nigger woman."

"And where is this Jute Payne now?"

"At his home."

"Then what is to prevent us from starting for the island at once?"

The start for the island was made without any delay, Pitts acting as guide.

They reached the spot on the shore where the dug-out was fastened, a couple of hours before sun-down.

"Is that the island?" asked Colonel Herring, pointing straight ahead of him.

"No," answered Pitts, "it's beyond that. You can't see it from the shore."

Colonel Herring, the detective and Pitts entered the dug-out, and it was shoved off into the stream.

They had scarcely disappeared beyond a bend before Polk Wells appeared at the water's edge, and looked after the retreating boat.

Then he went down the shore to the place where the boat had been fastened, and looked impatiently across the waters.

A short time elapsed, and the bow of the dug-out shot around the bend.

It had but one occupant.

The spot from which the outlaw looked had a leafy screen, and the oarsman's actions indicated that he had not seen his enemy.

Wells had brought his rifle with him to the shore.

When the dug-out had approached to within a hundred yards of the place of concealment Jesse James' comrade took deliberate aim, and pulled the trigger.

The bullet sped unerringly on its mission of death.

With a cry of agony the oarsman threw up his hands, stiffened a moment, and then fell forward over the dug-out and into the water.

But before his body sank from sight another bullet had plowed its way through the victim's brain.

"Dead this time for a million dollars," shouted Polk Wells, in malevolent glee. "That was the time I shot to kill."

CHAPTER CXLIII.

A TERRIFIC ENCOUNTER.

The dug-out with Jingo Pitts, Burton Braham and Colonel Herring reached the little island where Marcia Colving had been taken, according to Pitts' state-

ment, and landing in a small cove, the party walked up a gently sloping sandbank to a thick grove of cottonwoods.

"There's a sort of brush tent in here a piece," explained Pitts, as they went along, "and Miss Colving is there along with the deaf and dumb woman."

A short walk brought them to a high brush fence, which inclosed about half-an-acre of partly cleared land.

Within this inclosure was situated the rude habitation where Marcia Colving was supposed to be.

A narrow gateway, arched with vines, permitted the passage of but one person at a time.

Jingo Pitts, as guide of the expedition, entered first.

Colonel Herring came next.

What happened to Marcia's uncle was not made known to the detective until the next morning.

But something occurred when Braham passed through the narrow opening that had no part in his programme.

Two blows, one from the right and one from the left, each given with a club, caught him on the head, and he fell like an ox, and did not move.

A roughly-dressed man, with but one eye, a thin face, and a mouth screwed up on one side so as to give him a hideous appearance, stood by the side of Jingo Pitts and looked down at two prostrate and motionless forms.

"I wonder if we knocked 'em out for good, Jingo?" queried the one-eyed man, in a wheezy voice.

"Wouldn't wonder, Jute. These clubs of yours are ter'ble weepins in a strong man's hands."

"Yes, indeedy, Jingo, an' we strik' out fer keeps, an' no mistake."

There was a sort of a brush tent in the inclosure, as the traitorous villain, Pitts, had stated.

His story, as told to the detective, had been a mixture of lies and truth.

He had intended to betray him from the outset, and now he had performed the last act of the programme mapped out for him by Polk Wells.

Into the tent, which was roofed with old canvas, the two victims of Jingo Pitts' treachery were carried.

An examination of the injuries was then made.

There were faint signs of life in the body of the detective.

Colonel Herring had fared worse.

He was dead.

There were garden implements about the place, and the two villains spent half-an-hour more in digging a rude grave and burying the body of Marcia Colving's unfortunate uncle.

But this job was not undertaken until the clothing of the murdered man had been explored for money and valuables.

A gold watch and chain, two rings and over two hundred dollars in money rewarded their search.

A fair division of the plunder was made, Pitts taking the watch, as a part of his share.

It had been presented to Colonel Herring by an association of Confederate veterans at the close of his term as presiding officer, and there was an appropriate inscription on the inside of the case.

Having disposed of the body of the colonel, the murderers turned their attention to the detective.

The blows given him had been severe ones, and, though the skull had not been fractured, yet his stertorous breathing and his protracted insensibility indicated that he was suffering with concussion of the brain.

"He may not come out o' this yer stupor for days," said Jute Payne, as he fixed his one eye critically on the injured man's pale face, "and he may never come out of it at all."

"All the better if he doesn't make another chup. I've a good mind to give him another crack, and settle him for sure."

"No, I wouldn't do any more than I have, if I were you. Let Polk Wells give him the settler. He's the lad to do it, and he'll feel hurt, he will, if he ain't given the chance."

"All right, Jute; we'll let him alone, then."

It was arranged that Payne should remain on the island as guard over the detective until either Pitts or Polk Wells should arrive to relieve him.

It was close upon sundown when Jingo Pitts pushed off in his dug-out for the main shore.

He pushed his little craft steadily on, and had covered about half the distance to the landing-place, when a rifle shot rang out sharp and clear, and he fell forward into the water, with a bullet in his brain.

He heard not Polk Wells' exultant cry, for he was dead before the second shot was fired.

Believing that he had killed the detective Wells became anxious to secure the dug-out and hasten to the little island, where he hoped to find his evil comrades still in the land of the living.

There was a possibility, and a strong one, he was forced to admit, that Braham had put both of them out of the way.

But, in any event, he must go to the island.

As the dug-out refused to drift shoreward, he was compelled, much against his inclinations, to disrobe and swim out to it.

The red-handed outlaw reached the dug-out, clambered into it, and prepared to row it to shore.

CHAPTER CXLIV.

THE DETECTIVE MEETS WITH A REVERSE.

Rowing to the shore, Polk Wells put on his clothes, and, re-entering the dug-out, pulled for the little island.

He was met at the door of the brush tent by Jute Payne, whose first question sent a horrible suspicion into Polk Wells' mind.

"Whar's Jingo? Did you leave him behind?"

"Leave him behind? Nonsense! Why, he's here, isn't he?"

"Here nothing. He went off in the boat."

"But the detective—where is he?"

"Inside, with a head on him bigger'n a p'isened purp. You didn't take Jingo for the detective, did you?" he quickly interrogated, with a keen glance from his one eye into the outlaw's pale face.

"That's what I did," Wells groaned.

Then he stiffened up and looked sternly at his confederate.

"What's done," he said, in a hard tone, and with a meaning look, "can't be undone, and it's policy, good policy, Jute, for you to keep a stiff upper lip about what has happened to Jingo."

"Then he has—"

"He has left the country," coldly interrupted Wells, "and he won't be back this year, nor next, maybe. Now, that's all that need be said about it. Tell me what kind of a racket you had over here."

Jute Payne's story pleased Wells greatly.

He went in the tent, took a look at the insensible detective, and then came out again.

Darkness was approaching.

"I reckon you brought over a smack to eat, didn't you?" he said to Payne.

"Yes, there's an ash cake, cold ham and sich in the corner inside."

"That's good. Reckon I'll camp here to-night. To-morrow we start for Iowa, and the next day, if nothing happens, we will sail into Riverton and make the biggest winning of the year."

"Where are Shelford and Gartner?"

"With the horses, beyond Watson. They'll wait for me."

"Don't you wish Cummings was with you, Polk?"

"No; Jim's a tarrier, but he's cranky, and he might have kicked over the traces at the last moment, though he did promise to obey my orders. Let him go with Jess, if he likes, but, as for me, I want comrades who will stay by me, and who won't be shooting off their mouths at the wrong time."

After having refreshed himself from the provisions, Wells found a lantern, lighted it, and then for some time sat beside the detective's form, in a deep study.

It was while he was revolving some weighty subject in his mind that Braham opened his eyes, and fixed them steadily upon the outlaw's face.

"Ah!" exclaimed Wells, in satisfaction, "you've come to, have you?"

"I have been awake, if that's what you mean, for some time," was the slow response.

"Been shamming since I came in, eh?"

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES.

"No. I found it more comfortable in this poor light to keep my eyes closed."

"How's your head?"

"It aches some."

"If you could be allowed to have the dearest wish of your heart at this moment, what would it be?"

"To meet you in a fair fight, with or without weapons, in any shape, or in any style you might propose."

Polk Wells smiled and rubbed his hands.

"You're a game one, Mr. Braham, and, to be honest with you, I don't like you any the less for your spunk. If it were not for the fact that I have important business on hand I would go you one more just for luck."

"What; with fists?"

"No; pistols or knives."

"Let your business go and accommodate me," exclaimed the detective, with eagerness.

"Can't. Too much boddle involved. I must be in Riverton day after to-morrow, and I mustn't monkey any more with edged tools if I expect to be there."

"Then you fear the result of a meeting with me?"

"No, I don't," said Wells, coolly. "That isn't it. It's my luck that I am afraid of. It might go ag'in me if I tackled a sick man."

"But I am not sick. Cut these bonds, and you will see."

"Not this evening, Mr. Braham; after my return from Riverton I'll accommodate you."

This statement suggested two important questions, and the detective asked them one after the other:

"So you intend to rob the bank, do you? and you are not going to kill me right away?"

Wells bent a look of amusement on the eager, questioning face that was upturned to his.

"Of course I intend to rob the Riverton bank. Doesn't your experience with Jingo Pitts go to prove that he was a liar if he told a different kind of a story?"

"Yes, yes; I ought to have reflected that a traitor is always a liar."

"As to your other question, I will say this, Burton Braham, I am going to let you live, for, if any man has ever earned the right to hold on to life a while longer, you are the man. But you've got to stay here, however, for two days more, until the Riverton job is done. Then Jute here will let you free to do as you please about me, or go where you please on your own or other people's business."

A great load was suddenly lifted from the detective's breast.

He might not be able to prevent the robbery, but his release might come in time to rescue the beautiful niece of Colonel Herring before any serious harm had befallen her.

He did not mention Marcia's name, for fear of breaking the shell of the outlaw's spell of good humor.

Wells released Braham's hands, so that he could help himself to something to eat, after which he secured them tightly again.

All three men slept in the tent that night.

Before Wells left the island in the early morning he informed Braham that Colonel Herring was dead, but he laid the blame entirely on the shoulders of Jingo Pitts, who, he said, had exceeded his instructions in killing the girl's uncle.

"You can't score that crime against me," continued the desperado, "for I wasn't here, you know."

Braham said nothing in reply.

After he had gone Jute Payne came into the tent, and sat by the detective for an hour or more without opening his mouth, though his one eye kept blinking in a singular manner for nearly all that time.

Braham knew that the fellow had something on his mind, and that it would eventually come out.

So he, too, kept silence, and waited.

At last the jailer said, in a voice that was more wheezy than usual:

"I 'low Poke's gitten chicken-hearted in his old age."

"Yes?"

"Else why did he tell me to take good care on you till day arter to-morrow, and then turn you loose?"

"He has his reasons, I suppose."

"Reasons be danged! He's no right to act that a way without consultin' me. Where do I get off? I'm too old to be meanderin' aroun' the country chasing after stages 'n' railway trains 'n' banks and sick fodder, an' so I have to stay 'roun' home an' do sich odd jobs as fall inter my way."

"What can the fellow be driving at?" thought the detective.

"Now, where Poke made his mistake was in leaving me out of his calkelation. He sez to himself, 'I don't keer if the detective is loose when my fingers have closed on that bank boddle, for I'm going to California with Jesse James 'n' the gang, and he's welcome to folly me, if he wants, together with the whole raft of detectives and sheriffs from Chicago to Omaha.'

"Poke says this to himself, and I gits the order to turn you loose. But, as I said before, where do I get off? You air turned loose, and the first thing you does is to go after me for a killin' the colonel and snaking off the girl and I dunno what else. No use for me to skip, for my one eye and my left-handed fly-catcher would give me away in a holy minute."

"No, sir! no, sir-ree; Poke has made a mistake. That's what, and what's more, I ain't a-goin' to make another to keep him company. He may vota-

for lettin' you go, but my judgment is that you've got to have your wind shut off."

He paused, closed his one eye a moment, then slowly opened it, and gazed gravely at Braham.

The detective felt the cold shivers pass over him at Payne's matter-of-fact statement of his murderous intention.

A moment ago he had been congratulating himself over the prospect of freedom.

Now he was confronted with the prospect of immediate death, for Jute Payne was a man with no moral compunction, who, to hear him talk and to look at him, would as soon murder a man as eat.

As the bound man received the statement in silence, Payne, after a long pause, began to speak again.

"I reckon you're a man of your word, and that if you promised to forget all about me arter you was let loose, you would keep that promise, eh?"

Braham turned the matter over.

It would be better certainly to make the promise and let the lesser villain go scot-free in order to strike at the greater, and at the same time save an innocent girl from a cruel fate, than to stand up stubbornly for an abstract moral principal that would result in the sudden termination of his life.

"I will promise," he said, firmly.

The one-eyed villain heaved a sigh of relief.

"I reckon I've made a good bargain," he said.

"You can make a better one still if you will release me now."

"Shouldn't wonder," with a grin that gave his deformed mouth a frightful appearance.

"I will make it worth your while."

But you can't. It 'ud be more'n my life's worth to let you go afore the two days are up. Why, you'd light right out for Riverton, now, wouldn't you?"

"I expect I would," said Braham, frankly.

"Then I 'low you'll stay in this tent till I think it's time to use this yer knife on them ropes o' yours."

The detective knew from Payne's expression that it would be a waste of words to pursue the subject further.

So he accepted the situation with a forced smile, for he could not afford to show any annoyance or displeasure before the man who had just made him a present of his life.

A short time after the conversation thus detailed Payne left the tent for a stroll about the island.

Braham experienced a feeling of relief when he found himself alone.

An hour passed away, and he was in a half-dozen when shouts outside made him open his eyes with a start.

"Hold on thar, hold on, or I'll blaze away."

The voice was that of Jute Payne.

Braham listened in trembling eagerness for the answer.

None came.

"Stop mighty quick, now," again shouted Payne, "or pop goes your weasel."

The hurrying of feet over the dry leaves told the detective that some one was running toward the tent.

A pistol shot rang out the next instant, a bullet whizzed through the door and buried itself in a stout branch that served as one of the tent's supports.

A rustle of feminine garments outside was followed by the quick entrance of a young woman.

Burton Braham, lying on his side and looking toward the door with eagerness, saw her, and his heart began to beat in rapturous joy.

It was Marcia Colving.

Panting from exertion and excitement, but with a look of deathless resolve in her brilliant eyes, she sprang to the detective's side, and with a small knife which she held open in her hand cut the cords that bound him just at the moment that Jute Payne, pistol in hand, and with the face of a demon, appeared at the door.

One glance and he had taken in the situation, and then—

Crack! crack! went his revolver.

But the bullets never touched the fair girl at whom they were aimed, for upon the instant of the one-eyed desperado's appearance the detective with hands free pulled her down to the ground beside him.

The act was not observed by the murderous tool of Polk Wells, for it was done just as his fingers touched the trigger.

Under the impression that he had killed the would-be rescuer of the detective, he stepped forward with lowered pistol to gaze down at his terrible work, when he met with a surprise of the most aggravating character.

Burton Braham, summoning all his strength for the effort, leaped up suddenly, and caught Payne by the throat.

The villain struggled as best he could, but the terrible pressure about the windpipe continued until his tongue protruded and his eyes seemed about to start from their sockets.

Five minutes from the time of Marcia's entrance into the tent, Jute Payne lay bound hand and foot upon the ground, while Burton Braham, erect and masterful as of old, stood by his prostrate form with hands warmly clasping those of the lovely girl whose courage and daring had brought about his freedom.

Marcia's story, told while she sat outside the tent with the brave detective, was exciting only in the latter portion.

On the night of her capture at the old negro's cabin, she had been taken to Jute Payne's house, several miles away, and had been locked in a room by Polk Wells, who left her with the sneering injunction to take good care of herself, as he would return

to her within a week with a minister of the gospel, who should marry them hard and fast.

The next morning a deaf and dumb colored woman—an Amazon in strength and build—brought in her breakfast.

The prisoner's delight may be imagined, when in the poor creature she recognized a former slave of her uncle's—one who had dandled Marcia when a child on her knees.

The recognition was mutual, and the mute exhibited her joyful surprise in a manner that left no doubt of its genuineness.

By means of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, which Marcia understood, she was assured by the mute that no harm should happen to her, and that when it was safe to do so she might leave the house and make her way across the fields to Watson.

Jute Payne came to the house at noon, and remained a short time.

After he had gone, the mute, by signs, gave Marcia to understand that she would shadow the one-eyed rascal until she learned his destination, and, if it was at some distance from the house, the departure of the girl need not be longer delayed.

Marcia grew uneasy as the hours sped on, and the mute did not return.

She had about given up all hope of ever seeing her faithful servant again when the mute reappeared with some startling news.

She had followed Payne, to see him meet Jingo Pitts near the old negro's cabin, to form some idea of their conversation, which had for a subject the carrying out of an order given by Polk Wells that Colonel Herring, who was at the cabin that afternoon, should be decoyed to the little island in the river.

Anxious to discover more concerning the plot against her old master, she had remained in the vicinity of the cabin until she saw Colonel Herring and Pitts leave for the river shore.

Payne had gone to the island over an hour before.

When the party had passed out of sight, she had hurried back to the house.

Marcia's mind became filled with dire forebodings at the news that her uncle had gone off with the man who had treated her so brutally in the cabin.

She was a quick-witted girl, and she instantly concluded that the lives of Colonel Herring and the brave young man who had taken her part the day before, were in imminent danger.

The mute agreed to guide the brave girl to the island, and to support her in any effort, however dangerous, which she might make for the benefit of her friends.

They started forth early the next morning.

They did not venture near the spot where the dug-out had been secured, but made for a point half-a-

mile below, where the mute felt sure another apology for a boat could be obtained.

The craft was there, but it was a small raft, and not a dugout.

The mute had manipulated it before, and, as she was gifted with greater strength than the ordinary man, she sent it across the water with the greatest ease.

They reached the little island after Polk Wells had quitted it.

But their arrival was not unobserved.

Concealed behind a huge cottonwood, Jute Payne witnessed the landing, without making any attempt to prevent it.

He was curious to know what had brought them over.

Perhaps Polk Wells had sent them.

Anyway, it would not be policy to use violent measures until he had become satisfied that his own and his employer's interests were seriously menaced.

As Marcia and the devoted deaf mute walked up the bank Payne stepped from behind the tree and confronted them.

There was an ugly grin on his face, as he said, with a rasping wheeze:

"Come over for a picnic, I reckon."

"Where is my uncle?" sternly demanded Marcia.

"He's resting easier than he was a while ago," he answered, with a meaning his hearer did not interpret.

Then he added, quickly:

"Who sent you here, and what do you want?"

"We came of our own accord," the murdered colonel's niece boldly replied, "and if you will not answer my question and tell me where my uncle is perhaps you will stand aside and let us pass."

"No need to investigate further," thought the one-eyed villain. "Polk Wells never sent them here, and now that they are here they must not be allowed to skip out and give the alarm."

Without answering the girl or paying any attention to her request he fixed his one eye on the deaf mute, who stood, with an impassive face, by Marcia's side, and pointed to the raft.

"Go back," he said, in the sign language, "I will take care of the colonel's niece. Go back, or it will be the worse for you."

Instead of obeying him, the woman, with a strange muffled sound issuing from her throat, sprang forward with hands outstretched to seize the wretch who had dared to issue such an insulting command.

But he acted with even greater promptitude.

Her hands were about to clutch his throat when the muzzle of a pistol was thrust against her breast and the trigger pulled.

When the report died away the faithful mute swayed a moment, and then fell dead to the ground.

Marcia Colving gave one startled look at the life-

less form, and then with the instinct of self-preservation strongly upon her turned aside and fled through the trees with the speed of a deer.

It was sheer good luck that brought her in sight of the tent, for she had no idea of its location when she landed on the island.

When she started to run she had drawn her only weapon of defense—a small pocketknife—and she had it in her hand, opened, when she rushed into the tent where Braham was lying bound and helpless upon the ground.

Her story finished, the detective, sorrowful and unpleasant as the duty was, felt bound to tell her that her uncle had been killed.

She bore the loss with a fortitude befitting the occasion and her heroic character.

They learned the place of burial from the defeated villain, Payne, and when they left the island it was with the intention of making arrangements at Watson both for the removal of the body to Liberty, for the burial of the faithful mute's remains, and for the conveyance of the one-eyed confederate of Polk Wells to the county jail at Rockport.

They reached Watson late in the afternoon, and after their business with the officers and the undertaker had been concluded, Braham found that he had time to catch the up train for Riverton.

The bank robbery had been set for the next day, and he would be enabled to notify the sheriff of Fremont County and the local officers in time to prepare an unlooked-for surprise for Polk Wells and his murderous gang.

He was sorry to leave Miss Colving, and she was equally sorry to see him go.

They parted with the promise from Braham that he would call on her at Liberty so soon as his business in Iowa had been concluded.

Beyond El Paso, and near the big bend in the Missouri, something happened that clear autumn evening which made a sudden and unexpected change in the detective's plans.

Two trains met on the same track, one going south, the other north.

The collision derailed the car in which Braham was riding, and he and several others were badly injured.

He had the misfortune to be thrown with great violence against one of the windows, and that part of his head which had suffered from the club strokes two days before received a blow that, for the second time brought on insensibility.

At El Paso he received the best of treatment, but his senses did not return to him until the earth was shrouded in darkness.

He was in a room in one of the hotels, and by his bedside was an old man who had been acting as his nurse since the accident.

Braham was some time collecting his thoughts. At last his situation dawned on him, and he asked feverishly:

"I have been here some hours, haven't I?"

"Yes."

"What time is it?"

"Two o'clock in the morning."

"Ah! good. I thought it might be later."

He rose up in bed and felt of himself.

His head ached somewhat, but he felt no other pain anywhere.

"There is nothing the matter with me," he remarked, with satisfaction.

"Nothing much, I should say, now that you've got your mind back."

Braham got out of bed slowly.

He found that he could hardly walk across the floor on account of stiffness from the bruises and shaking up he had received.

He ordered some strong soup, drank it, and felt immeasurably better.

Having paid the nurse for his services he asked him to go to the nearest livery stable, wake up the hostler, and procure for him a fast saddle horse.

When the man had departed on his errand, he thought over his plan of campaign.

The robbery of the bank would come off a few hours after daylight, and therefore it would be taking too large a risk to wire the officers at Riverton of the contemplated raid, for they might not receive the warning until too late to make an effective movement.

No, he must ride to Riverton and deliver the warning in person.

The town was only about twenty miles distant, and he could easily reach it by daybreak.

At three o'clock he left El Paso, mounted on an animal that was noted more for reliability than fleetness of foot.

It was six o'clock, and the sun was shining when he entered the suburbs of Riverton.

A party of horsemen, armed with rifles, met him as he turned the first corner.

In the leader, he recognized the sheriff of Fremont County.

"Hello, Braham," exclaimed that officer, in surprise, "what brings you here? I expected to find you far ahead of us?"

"Ahead of you? Why, what has happened?"

"The bank was robbed yesterday afternoon by Polk Wells' gang, and I'm just starting out after them."

Robbed yesterday!

The detective saw it all in a flash.

The railway accident had occurred two days before, and he had lain unconscious in the hotel at El Paso for nearly thirty-six hours.

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES.

CHAPTER CXLV.

LED INTO A TRAP.

From the sheriff of Fremont County Braham learned that the robbers had descended upon the bank so unexpectedly that no resistance on the part of the officials of that institution was possible.

The raid had been carefully planned, and the number of raiders had been variously estimated from five to fifteen, though the sheriff was inclined to think that four would cover the entire number.

A large sum of money in coin, notes and securities had been carried off.

No attempt to follow the robbers had been made until they had remounted their horses and passed beyond the town limits.

Then a posse of determined men was hastily organized, and a hot pursuit undertaken.

A few miles out the robbers were overtaken, and a running fight ensued, in which the posse suffered defeat, no one being killed outright, but every member being wounded.

"That fellow, Wells," said the sheriff, "fought like a devil incarnate. The men of the posse outnumbered his force three to one, and yet Wells himself seemed invested with the punishing power of ten ordinary men, for his shots never missed, while the bullets flew around him like hail, and never touched his person.

"And what a perfect horseman he is, too! Why, they tell me that he rivaled a Comanche warrior in the skill and agility with which he gyrated about his horse while the fight was on.

"I was up at the county seat when the robbery took place," concluded the sheriff, "or else I should have been in the field at an earlier moment."

"Have you any clew as to their present whereabouts?" asked the detective.

"No definite clew, but I am inclined to think that, as Jake Shelford was one of the gang, the first hiding-place will be in the vicinity of Watson, across the line in Missouri, where Jake's folks live."

Watson! Why, he, Braham, had left Watson two days before, and he had left Marcia Colving there.

What if Polk Wells had had the reckless daring to return to a part of Missouri where he was well known, while the echoes of the Riverton robbery were still vibrating in the air, and while the great valley region roundabout was in arms against him, and seeking his capture, alive or dead!

The more Braham pondered the matter the more he became convinced that Wells had started for Watson after he had successfully made his plundering raid into Iowa.

The detective readily consented to join the sheriff's party.

When near the Missouri line, information received

from a farmer induced the sheriff to change his course.

"They have not crossed over to Missouri," he said to Braham, "but have gone into Taylor County. The best plan, then, will be to ride to the nearest railway station, and get over into Taylor County as quick as we can."

"Are you sure your information can be depended upon?"

"Why shouldn't it? The man who gave it is an old resident, and he got it straight from Jake Shelford's uncle."

Finding it impossible to dissuade the sheriff from taking the new track, the detective announced his intention of proceeding to Watson alone.

"I have business there that must be looked after immediately," he explained.

The sheriff parted with him with sincere regret, for he had a great admiration of the young man's detective abilities.

Braham arrived at Watson shortly after noon, and, before satisfy the needs of the inner man, went to the hotel where he had left Marcia Colving.

She was not there.

Inquiries of the landlord elicited the information that she had gone to Liberty on the train which bore the remains of her murdered uncle.

The detective breathed easier after this intelligence.

He went to a restaurant, ate a hearty meal, and was in the act of starting out for the depot to take the train for Liberty, when a telegram was placed in his hands by a messenger boy.

It was dated at Liberty, and read as follows:

DEAR MR. BRAHAM—Will start in an hour for Blue Springs, Jackson County, on a matter of life and death. If you can manage to meet me there this evening others will be obliged besides your friend,

MARCIA COLVING.

"A curious telegram this," thought the detective.

Could the fair girl, whose image had been engraved on his heart ever since their first meeting, be the author, or was it the cunning device of an enemy to lure him into a position of peril?

There was a way of solving the problem which beset his mind, and he took it at once.

He went straightway to the telegraph office, where he was well known, and had the operator at Liberty wire for certain important information.

The answer came in a short time, and it was to the effect that the dispatch which Braham had received had been written and sent by Miss Colving. Also that duplicates had been wired to Riverton and El Paso, as the young lady was not certain at which one of the points the detective would be found.

While he was in the office another telegram came for Braham.

The sheriff of Fremont County, Iowa, at Bedford,

as the sender, and it contained some surprising news.

It ran:

I have got the straight business at last. The robbers divided after reaching this place, Gartner, Shelford, and a party whose name I haven't yet learned, going northeast, in the direction of Wisconsin, while Polk Wells, the leader, headed for Missouri, his destination being Blue Springs. He is probably there by this time. Have wired the sheriff of Jackson County, and shall trust the matter of attending to Wells to you and to him.

The two telegrams, taken together, gave Braham food for serious reflection.

Polk Wells and Marcia Colving bound for the same point?

What could it mean?

What new piece of deviltry was on foot?

He could not read the riddle, try as he would, but he resolved, all the same, to be at Blue Springs as quick as railway steam power could take him.

He had an hour at his disposal before the train left, and he thought he could not devote the time to better purpose than by calling at the jail and having an interview with Jute Payne.

Before going to the place, he obtained some points about the prisoner's family.

The one-eyed prisoner screwed up his mouth in malevolent rage when Braham entered his cell.

"Curse you," he wheezed, "but some one will do you up for gittin' me in a hole like this. Wait till Polk Wells runs afoul of you."

"I will wait for that time with the greatest of pleasure," said the detective, composedly.

"What do you want here?" growled Payne, when his visitor had taken a seat and was coolly observing him.

"I want to know who is looking after your sick wife?"

"The neighbors, I expect."

"The neighbors are too remote to be of any service."

"Well, then, I'll have the county look after her."

"And she may die while the county's officials are getting ready to do something."

Jute Payne trembled and turned pale.

His black heart had one soft spot, and that was a lingering affection for the woman who had stood by him so faithfully for so many years.

"What are you ringin' in my wife on me for?" he demanded, as he choked down a sob.

"For a purpose, of course," returned the detective, coldly.

"Out with your purpose. What is it?"

"I want certain information, which I am satisfied you are able to give me, and in return for which I will see that your wife receives proper care and attention."

"Tell me what you want?" said Payne, submissively, "and if it won't make it any warmer for me I'll stand in and help you."

"I want to know why Polk Wells has gone to Blue Springs."

The one eye of the prisoner twinkled knowingly.

"I've got no call to give anybody away," he said.

"Neither have I got any call to help the wife of a murderer, who may be as bad as he is, even though she may be in serious want of assistance at this moment."

Payne glared at the passionless speaker as if he would like to strangle him.

Braham smiled inwardly, and waited for the prisoner's surrender.

He had not long to wait.

"'Every man for himself,' I reckon, is the best motto, I 'low, arter all," muttered the one-eyed wretch. "Well," said he to the detective, "I'll tell you why Polk Wells has gone to Blue Springs. There's to be a meeting of the gang there to-night."

"What gang?"

"Why, Frank and Jesse James' gang, o' course."

"What is the object of the meeting?"

"Dunno, but I can guess."

"Guess then."

"The boys intended to hold up the Chicago and Alton train a few miles beyond Blue Springs, at the deep cut, they call it, night before last, but I'm told by the marshal that the party did not come off."

"Well?"

"But it will come off, though, sure pop, as long as Jesse and Frank James are runnin' things; an' my idee is that the meeting at Blue Springs is to set the time and put up the job for another attempt."

"Why should Polk Wells be there?"

"Why, he's Jesse James' best man, next to Frank, an' I'll bet a hog that the reason that the train wasn't held up 'cordin' to programme was because Polk Wells wasn't there."

"But Jesse James sent them northward to Riverton on another layout."

"I don't keer. You just go on to Blue Springs, and see if I ain't right."

"I am going there," returned Braham, with grim determination, but added, in a more kindly tone, "I'll see that your wife is looked after before I start."

There was but one other matter that worried Braham when he had taken passage on the train for Blue Springs, and that was the reason for Marcia Colving's departure for the place.

She had gone on a mission of life and death.

Whose life was menaced?

The answer to this question came when he reached Blue Springs.

He had taken the precaution to put on a disguise before leaving Watson, and it was as a forlorn specimen of a poor white, or "cracker," that he appeared on the streets of the little town.

It was twilight when he walked from the station

toward the principal hostelry, where he expected to find Miss Colving.

But he had not gone half the distance before a light touch on the arm caused him to look around with a start.

A trim-built negro girl stood before him.

"Is yo' name Brayum, sah?" she asked, in the sweetest of voices.

The detective looked at the girl with suspicion in his eyes.

"Why do you ask?" he said.

"Cos if yo' is I done got somefin fo' yo'."

"My name kain't be Braham," said the young man, experimentally.

"What is it, den, ef I dun mek bold to ax yo', sah?"

"It is Dennis."

"Dennis? An' yo' sho' yo' hain' got no udder name?"

She spoke seemingly in serious innocence.

Braham answered gravely:

"I reckon my name mout be anything from Moses ter Mud, 'cordin' ez how I war treated."

"Can yo' read white folkses writin'?"

"Sometimes."

"Den read dis."

She held out an envelope.

The light was just sufficient for him to read the inscription, which was in a woman's neat and delicate handwriting:

MR. BURTON BRAHAM.

Immediate.

It was from Marcia Colving, of course.

"My name is Braham," he said, in his natural tones, as he tore it open.

Inside was a half-sheet of note paper, with these words written upon it:

Follow the bearer. She is keen-witted and faithful, and she will guide you to me. M. C.

"I am at your service," remarked Braham, politely, when he had placed the note in his pocket.

The girl showed her white teeth in a pleasant smile, and then started briskly down the street.

Through the town they went, and out of it for a distance of several miles.

It was nearly eight o'clock before they halted before a small, weather-beaten house, in a gully, not far from the railroad.

There were no lights visible about the premises, but when the colored girl gave two gentle knocks at the front door, bolts were instantly shoved back, and the door was opened.

She slipped in, and Burton Braham, with his heart beating joyously, quickly followed.

But he had no sooner stepped across the threshold than strong arms seized him and threw him roughly to the floor.

If he had been led into a trap.

CHAPTER CXLVI.

IN A VILLAIN'S POWER.

The colored girl who gave the detective the letter signed "M. C.," and who led him to the lonely house where a terrible surprise awaited him, was Chloe, the daughter of Aunt Polly, Col. Herring's old servant.

And Chloe had ever been devoted to the interests of her young mistress, Marcia.

How then had it come about that she had been forced to play a role inimical to Miss Colving's interests and purposes?

Let us go back a little.

When the dead body of the murdered colonel had been consigned to its last resting-place at Liberty, on the day following the departure of Braham for Riverton, the bereaved niece returned to the home that had been rendered desolate by the taking off of the kindest friend she had ever known—her father and mother had died when she was an infant—and in her own bedroom gave way at last to the terrible strain that she had been bravely bearing for more than forty-eight hours.

Tears are not a sign of weakness, in the sense that weakness denotes want of courage or will power.

The strongest and the bravest weep, for, as a rule, they are the most emotional.

And tears are sorrow's best antidote.

The next morning, while she was about to leave her room to call on Aunt Polly for a discussion of material matters connected with the household, Chloe timidly knocked at the door.

Given permission to enter, she came in, with eyes rolling with excitement.

"Mose Washington's yere, Miss Marshy," she said, gaspingly.

"That's the colored boy who lives near Rockport, isn't it?" returned her mistress, kindly.

"Yessum, but he's no boy, Miss Marshy, he's a growed-up pussen, an' ol' er than I is."

"Ah, and what brings him to Liberty?"

"Dat's wa'at I come to tell you 'bout, Miss Marshy," Chloe went on, with more calmness. "He's yeared somefin' 'bout dat wicked Poke Wells an' de gang."

The young lady's interest was immediately aroused to its keenest pitch.

"Tell me what he has learned, Chloe," she said quickly and impressively.

"He done say, Miss Marshy, dat he yere the uncle ob Jake Shelford—he's one o' de gang—say dat all de members gwine meet at Blue Springs dis berry-night. An' he say, too, date Poke Wells gwine to be dar," she said.

Marcia's brow darkened, and a fierce look came into her eyes.

She held Polk Wells accountable for the murder of her uncle, and she felt that she could undergo any

sacrifice or peril to bring the red-handed outlaw to justice.

"Mose, he tolle me," continued Chloe, "dat he ain't tolle no one else 'bout de mattah, 'ca'se he wan' yo', Miss Marshy, to boss de whole business on 'count o' yo' bein' kynder pregidised ag'in dat bad Poke feller."

Prejudiced against him! Prejudice was a feeble word to express Marcia's feelings.

Her lips tightened, but she made no comment.

"An' Mose, he say, too, Miss Marshy, dot ef yo' wants him to he'p yo' anyways he's yer huckleberry, dat was his identikle word, Miss Marshy."

"Where is he?"

"In de kitchen."

"Send him up to me; I want to talk to him about this matter."

Mose soon appeared, wearing an important expression.

He had never been a slave, and he had always entertained a contempt for those of his race who had ever been in a condition of servitude.

Short, thin, active, with twinkling black eyes, small and set close together, and a nose sharper than that of the average negro, he seemed the personification of cunning and alertness.

Not in the least abashed in the presence of a lady, and his superior, he glibly told his story.

He had been taking an afternoon siesta in a hay-barn, when the sound of voices outside attracted his attention.

The speakers were Jake Shelford's Uncle Billy and Polk Wells.

After the twain had gone, Mose said he crept out of the barn, hurried to the nearest railway station, and took the first train for Liberty.

"And now, Miss Colving," he said, without a trace of dialect, "I am at your service. I love Chloe, and she loves you. What more need be said? Her cause is your cause, and your cause is my cause. Command me, and I will go through fire and water to prove my devotion and sincerity."

She thanked him for his proffer with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Did these terrible men," she asked, presently, "say for what object the meeting at Blue Springs was called?"

"No; but it's something of the greatest importance to them, as Jesse and Frank James and every member of that notorious band of outlaws will be present."

She mused for a moment, and then, looking up quickly, said, with firmness:

"I am going to Blue Springs this afternoon, and I want you to go with me, Moses."

"With pleasure."

The young negro exhibited no surprise at her strange determination.

"It is my intention," she went on, "to overhear what is said at that meeting, if such a thing be possible."

"I will do my best to aid you."

"Ef you is goin' to dat Springs place, Miss Marshy," put in Chloe, with decision, "den I goes right along wid yo'. I ain' gwine trus' yo'se'f alone wid dat Moses nohow. Yo' heah me?"

Moses grinned his approbation of this speech.

"Yes," replied Marcia, after she had considered the matter. "You may go with us, Chloe. You can probably make yourself very useful to me."

It was at Moses' suggestion that Marcia sent the telegram to Burton Braham, though it is probable that she would have taken this course had she been left to herself.

The train which bore Miss Colving and her two servants to Blue Springs arrived at that station two hours before sundown.

They went at once to the principal hotel, and after refreshments Marcia sent Mose out to discover, if possible, the place of the outlaw's meeting.

He returned in a little over an hour, with the cheering information that he had shadowed Jake Shelford's Uncle Billy to a secluded spot in a gully some two miles out of town.

"And I've found the place to camp in while we're waiting for a chance to steal up on the gang and pipe off their doings," he said, with a satisfied expression. "It's a deserted house in the same gully. No one has lived there for months, for I went all over it. As it is likely that the robbers will be coming in over the road we've got to take to get to the house, we'd better be moseying up there now, don't you think?"

"Yes, the sooner we get there the better," she said, and ten minutes later they were on their way to the gully.

She was heavily veiled, she had attired herself in some of her cast-off garments of years agone, and it was not likely that the keenest eyes of friend or foe would ever recognize her.

They met no one on the way to the house.

Once inside Mose made another suggestion to the effect that Burton Braham ought to be notified of her presence at the house upon the arrival of the train due an hour hence at the depot.

"I had thought of that," Marcia replied, "and, as detectives are proverbially suspicious, as they ought to be, I will write a note, which one of you may deliver."

She brought out an envelope and paper from the small satchel she carried with her, and indited the brief note, which Braham received according to instructions.

Mose suggested that Chloe be sent on the errand to the depot for the reason that if, by any mischance, that wicked outlaw, Polk Wells, should take a notion

to investigate the house, Miss Colving would have a man to stand by and protect her from harm.

The little darkey spoke with such serious earnestness, albeit his eyes did twinkle curiously, as the words fell from his lips, that Chloe herself insisted that she should undertake the mission.

The faithful girl had been gone from the house about fifteen minutes when there came a knock at the front door.

Mose began to tremble.

"That's queer," he chatteringly said, "very queer. Why should any one knock at the door of a house no one lives in?"

"Perhaps some of the people living in this region saw us come in, and have called out of curiosity," returned Marcia, with forced composure.

The knocking was repeated.

"I'll—I'll go to the door if you say so, Miss Colving," said Mose, but he looked as if he would rather loose an arm than do it.

Marcia gave him a contemptuous glance, and then boldly started to answer the knock.

"Who's there?" she demanded, in clear, firm tones, when she reached the door.

"A messenger from Burton Braham," was the reply, in a voice she had never heard before.

She threw back the bolts on the instant of the welcome announcement.

And she immediately regretted her haste.

For the door was opened quickly, and two powerfully-built men stepped into the little hall.

One was Polk Wells, the other was Jake Shelford's Uncle Billy, a counterpart of Jim Cummings in strength, ugliness and ferocity.

It was child's play to them to secure a young woman taken by surprise, and with no weapon of defense at hand.

Marcia had not time to scream before Polk Wells' hand had closed over her mouth.

What followed seemed to her like a nightmare, as she attempted to recall it afterward.

When her mind became collected, she found herself in a cellar and lying on an old mattress.

She could not move, for the wretches who had attacked her had firmly bound her with cords to guard against the possibility of escape.

CHAPTER CXLVII.

DUEL IN A CELLAR.

Burton Braham, overcome by Polk Wells and Uncle Billy Shelford, as he entered the house on the heels of Chloe, was dragged into the main apartment, where there were a few rickety chairs and a bench, and there suffered to remain in darkness, a prey to the wildest conjectures, until a lantern, brought by Shelford, had been lighted.

He had been bound immediately upon his heavy fall to the floor, and, after his enemy had flashed the rays of the lantern into his face, to note its expression probably, he was lifted to a sitting position, and propped against the wall.

Thus placed, Braham looked calmly about him.

He was alone in the room with Polk Wells.

Uncle Billy Shelford, agreeable to the arrangements, had left the two men to have their confab in private.

Jesse James' famous comrade broke the silence by saying:

"Didn't look for me here, I reckon?"

"No; I did not."

"Didn't ever suspect that I put up the job to get you out here, either?"

"No, and I don't suspect it now."

"Well, I did, all the same. Let me tell you how I was. Time's no object, and we've got all night before us."

Braham wrathfully gritted his teeth.

"Don't make faces, my friend," said Wells, placidly, "for they don't become your style of beauty."

After lighting a cigarette and exhaling a few puffs of smoke through his nostrils he went on with provoking coolness:

"The girl, Chloe, who brought you here, never played a trick on you. She is true to her mistress Miss Marcia."

"Is Miss Colving here?" interrupted the detective.

"Yes, she is here, and under my protection." Braham groaned.

"As I was saying," pursued Wells, "Chloe is no in my service. Her lover, a young mope of the name of Mose, is. See?"

"No, I don't see."

"Beg pardon, I was hasty. You don't know Mose. After a while I'll bring him in and introduce him to you. He's a nailer, I tell you. Sharp as a steel trap, and able to pull the wool over the eyes of the cutest detective that ever hustled for a reward."

"Well, this nigger, Mose, did exactly as I told him to do. He inveigled Miss Marcia out here by means of a cock-and-bull story, and Miss Marcia, prompted by Mose, drew you to the place as well. A pretty slick arrangement, I take it."

He chuckled softly, and rubbed his hands.

"Now that you've got me in a trap what do you intend to do with me?" asked Braham.

"You'll be surprised when I tell you that my object in luring you here was to offer you another chance to best me."

"What! Are you willing to offer me a fair fight?"

"I mean that if you croak it will be because you are not able to take care of your end of the string. Do you remember what I said to you on the island?"

"Yes, that you would accommodate me—fight another duel—after your return from Riverton."

"Correct. And I have returned from Riverton," rejoined Wells, complacently.

Braham looked at the outlaw as if he could scarcely credit the evidence of his ears.

"Do you mean to tell me seriously," he said, "that you took all this trouble to get me here for the sole purpose of giving me another chance to meet you in fair combat?"

"That's what."

The tone was positive and sincere.

"You're a curious fellow, Wells."

"So I've been told."

"What if I kill you?"

"Then I'll be dead, and all my worries will be over."

"And Miss Colving? If I come out ahead in the proposed duel, what is reserved for her?"

"Your arms. If I kill you she's mine. If you kill me my interest in her ceases forever. See?"

"I see. Where is she?"

"Down cellar. Chloe is with her, I expect, for I told Mose to yank her down there the moment she came through the door. And Uncle Billy went down there when he left us, so I reckon the girl is fixed the same as her mistress."

"But your comrade, Uncle Billy, as you call him, won't he interfere if I get the better of you?"

"No, for he won't be here when the scrap takes place. He'll be miles away when it's over, and he'll never come back."

"What sort of a duel have you thought of?" asked the detective, after a thoughtful pause.

"A duel with pistols, and in the dark."

Braham felt a cold chill pass over him.

But in a moment his nerve came to his aid, and he steeled his heart against a further exhibition of weakness.

"And it will come off," continued the imperturbable outlaw, "in about fifteen minutes."

He left the room after uttering these words, returning in a few moments with the announcement that all was serene in the cellar, and that Uncle Billy Shelford had taken his departure.

"As for Mose, whether he stays or not makes no difference. If you win, he will light out for the other side of the world; if you fail, he's my own, and right where he should be."

The black rascal, who had been listening at the door, came in on the heels of this speech.

He wore a subdued expression, and, after casting one furtive glance at Braham, seated himself on a bench, and waited for developments.

The detective had enough to think of at this time without wasting any thoughts on the treacherous Mose.

He knew much concerning Polk Wells' capabilities as a fighter.

But there was one thing he did not know.

He was unaware of the fact that his antagonist was one of the finest pistol shots in the United States.

Nor did he suspect that Wells was well aware of his advantage, and that he intended to act promptly upon it and kill him.

The cords about Braham's ankles were cut, and he was conducted to a large room in the basement, or cellar.

The walls were of brick, and the two small windows had been covered with pieces of old matting, so that when the lantern was extinguished and the door closed it would be as dark as Erebus in the place.

Wells informed the detective that Marcia and Chloe were locked in a little lavatory, in one corner under the kitchen.

The knowledge that the woman he loved was in such close proximity to him, though a prisoner, caused Braham's heart to beat faster, and infused new courage into his veins.

After Mose had been sent out, Wells locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"If you make a winning to-night you can take the key from me," he grimly remarked.

The detective had passed the point of using his tongue in speech, unless in answer to a pertinent question.

He had thoughts only for the strange and terrible conflict that was about to take place.

Both combatants might be killed.

Or he might slay Wells, and himself be desperately wounded.

In the latter event, how would he fare at the hands of that cunning and unscrupulous negro, Mose?

His meditations were interrupted by his enemy, who, stepping up to him, cut the cord which secured his wrists.

"Now," said Wells, with deadly emphasis, "I will tell you what the programme is. You will take your choice of the pistols I shall offer you, and then select any corner of the cellar you choose. I will take the opposite one. The lantern I will place under an empty nail keg, one end to be propped up a few inches by a stick. When I kick the stick and the box falls to shut out the light, then the ball opens. Look out for your first shot, for that's the one that ought to count."

Did Wells intend to fire ahead of time? Else why should he offer such honest and sensible advice?

The detective was puzzled at the outlaw's words, as he had been puzzled before by his actions, but he kept silent.

He was too preoccupied a moment later to notice that the pistol he chose was forced on him by Wells, something after the manner of the expert card manipulator.

The time was at hand when the deadly conflict was to begin.

Braham selected the corner nearest the lavatory.

Jesse James' red-handed comrade smiled derisively.

Once in his own corner, with the keg and the lantern at hand, Wells prepared for the closing act in the preliminaries.

The lantern was placed in the position already spoken of, and the keg raised with a short stick.

Then Polk Wells, tall, grim and terrible, looked across the room in the semi-darkness at the shadowy form of his courageous opponent.

"Are you ready?"

No answer.

Out went the outlaw's foot, down with a thud came the keg, and out went the light.

On the instant that the keg fell two reports rang out so close together that they became nearly blended into one.

A howl of pain from one of the corners.

Crack! crack! again, but the combatants, being men of shrewdness, had shifted their places, and only the air in the room was perforated.

Crack!

Another groan, and no answering shot, but a heavy fall upon the floor.

The victor now fired into the ceiling, for the purpose of determining, in the flash of light caused by the explosion, the exact location of his fallen foe.

Having satisfied himself as to the place, he moved forward cautiously in that direction.

No need to have obtained that flash of light, for the victim's groans were a sufficient guide.

At last the man who had come out first in the struggle reached the prostrate form of his enemy.

He placed one hand upon the breast, and then was about to strike a match, when he was seized around the waist by two arms of tremendous power.

"I am not dead yet," hissed the assailant, "and if I can't kill you one way I will in another."

The speaker was Polk Wells, and it was Burton Braham, the detective, who had come out unharmed in the contest.

But the danger was not yet over.

A terrible hand-to-hand struggle commenced. Each man realized that he was fighting for his life.

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

A DESPERATE CRIMINAL.

Though severely wounded by the bullets fired from the detective's pistol, Polk Wells struggled with the strength and desperation of a lion at bay.

If he understood the reason why he failed to bring his adversary down when the ball opened, he kept it to himself, for not a word escaped his lips as he wrestled over the floor with the equally game and skillful detective.

Suddenly there came a rush of feet and the flashing of a light in his face.

The next instant Wells received a blow on the head from a clubbed revolver that knocked him senseless.

"Are you hurt?" inquired the rescuer, anxiously.

"Not a particle," answered Braham, as he arose to his feet and started in amazement at the question.

"I didn't intend that you should be hurt, sir, for if things had gone amiss Chloe would never have forgiven me."

The speaker was Mose Washington, the colored youth, whom the detective had regarded but a short time before as a traitor; as the wretch who, at Polk Wells' instigation, had lured him to the house.

"I have wronged you, Mose," he said, contritely, as he offered his hand to the darkey. "I had placed you in the list of my enemies and the friends of that scoundrel there," pointing to the prostrate outlaw.

"Yes, I reckon I played my part for all it was worth, sir. I had to work it pretty slick, or I never would have deceived Mr. Wells. I knew you wanted to capture the robber of the Riverton bank, and I knew also that Miss Colving was anxious to bring to justice the man who caused the death of her uncle, and so I put up a scheme to get Mr. Wells in a hole."

"You see I'd worked for him before, when Chloe and I were strangers, and I was kind o' careless as to what I did, and so I fell into this job as easy as you please."

"I might have worked it so that you could have been first at the house, and surprised him when he came in, but I concluded it would be safer to take the course I did, especially as I had fixed the pistols, and knew that he was bound to get left no matter what way he jumped."

"I might have taken the wrong pistol, the one with blank cartridges," said Braham. "What would have resulted in that event?"

"There was not much danger of your getting the wrong one. But, even if you had, I would have prevented your murder, for I would have waltzed in myself at the right moment, and given Mr. Wells a gentle surprise."

The detective was satisfied with Mose's arrangement, especially as it had turned out all right.

After the defeated outlaw's wounds had been attended to—they were not dangerous after the flow of blood had been stopped—and he had been handcuffed, Braham hastened to the lavatory where Marcia and Chloe were supposed to be.

Mose opened the door for him, and the detective entered a small room, well lighted, and was surprised and delighted to find the woman he loved sitting unrestrained in a chair.

There was a wildly anxious expression on her pale

face as he entered, but when she saw his handsome features a glad cry escaped her, and she arose blushingly to greet him.

The moment was an auspicious one for Burton Braham, and Marcia made no resistance when he clasped her in his manly arms, and imprinted his first kiss upon her burning cheek.

Mose looked at the lovers a moment—for such they now were—and grinned from ear to ear.

Then he walked up to Chloe, who was standing demurely in a corner, and, flinging his arms around her neck, brought his lips to hers, and induced an osculatory explosion that made the detective and his sweetheart start guiltily and look around.

Poke Wells remained in the house all night, guarded by Mose and Braham, and in the morning was placed on the north-bound train, to be conveyed to Fremont County, Iowa, for trial.

The detective had him in charge.

Miss Colving, Chloe and Mose were passengers on the same train.

The detective's sweetheart got off at Kansas City for the purpose of visiting relatives there.

Chloe and Mose went on to Liberty in another train.

At the first station in Atchison County several rough-looking men boarded the car in which Braham and Wells had for some time been the only occupants.

At one point in this section the railroad runs near the river, and on account of repairs that were going on in the roadbed the train ran at a very slow rate of speed.

Braham was looking out of the window at the scenery, with no thought of danger, when one of the newcomers, who sat behind him, struck him a crushing blow on the head with an iron bar.

When he recovered consciousness the conductor was bending over him, and his prisoner was gone.

Jesse James had come to the rescue of his redoubtable comrade.

The men who had entered the car at the first Atchison station were adherents of his, and had acted according to instructions.

Braham was intensely chagrined at his misadventure, and, in spite of his injuries, left the train at Watson and organized a posse to search for the escaped robber and murderer.

But he did not leave town that day, for a faintness

overtook him in the hotel, which he could not subdue, and for twenty-four hours he was under the doctor's care.

When he managed to get about again, he received the cheering intelligence that Polk Wells had joined his comrades in the Riverton bank robbery, and was now over the Iowa border and in Wisconsin.

Braham took the first train for the northeast, and the next day was in Portage, Columbia County, Wisconsin, on the heels of the outlaw fugitives.

Here he met the sheriff of Fremont County, Iowa.

"I am glad you have joined us again," said that officer, with earnestness, "for we are close on to the gang, and I want men with me who can be depended upon.

The next morning Polk Wells, crawling stiffly out of his nest in a haystack near Fox Lake, looked over the fields gloomily, and then accosted Jake Shelford, who was cooking a hasty breakfast nearby:

"It's lucky my left arm caught the bullets the other night, or I'd be badly handicapped for the scrap that is soon to come off in this neighborhood."

"Why, Polk, what's come over you? There won't be any fight hereabouts. You must have been dreaming some condemned nonsense to make you talk like that. Who's to fight us, I'd like to know? We slid into this county unbeknown to the officers, and here we've been since noon yesterday, with no sign of an enemy in the distance, and with grub enough to last a week."

"I did have a dream last night," said Wells, "and with me dreams generally come true."

"What did you dream?" interrogated Bill Gartner, another of the party.

"I dreamed that the sheriff of Fremont County was after us, and that Burton Braham, the detective, who has more lives than a cat, was with him. I dreamed that Bill Gartner had just picked up a hot potato——"

At this juncture Gartner, with a smile, took a potato out of the hot ashes of the fire in front of him.

"When a bullet from the detective's rifle knocked the potato into smithereens, and made us jump for cover."

Ping! came a sharp detonation, and the potato which Gartner held high in the air was shattered into bits.

The outlaws sprang to their feet in alarm.

THE JESSE JAMES STORIES.

No one was more surprised than Polk Wells.

He had placed no credence in the dream, and had narrated it in a semi-serious manner for his own amusement.

At the top of a hill, a couple of hundred yards away, an armed force of mounted men could be seen.

At their head was the sheriff of Fremont County, and by his side rode Burton Braham.

The horses of the outlaws were tethered near the haystack, but there was no time to mount and make an escape.

The comrade of Jesse James must make a stand with his men then and there, and fight stubbornly for life.

The outlaws were four in number.

Opposed to them were a dozen of the bravest and most determined men in the State of Iowa.

The haystack was utilized as a barricade, but Jake Shelford was toppled over by a bullet which pierced his brain before he could get under cover.

Polk Wells discharged his rifle twice, and had the satisfaction of seeing one enemy drop at each shot before he attempted to seek the safe shelter of the stack.

The bullets fairly rained about him as he turned his back on his foes and ran to join his two surviving comrades.

One shot struck him in the hip, and he fell to the ground, but immediately rose again, and, turning his face to the rapidly-approaching horsemen, shook his fist at them, at the same time making the air fairly sulphurous with his profanity.

Behind the stack was his horse, and he reached the animal just as the sheriff had divided his forces a hundred yards off.

"It's no use, boys," he gasped. "To stay here is death, and I'm going to take my medicine on the wing. Some one help me to mount."

No one came to his aid.

Gartner and his companion had made for their respective animals the moment he had spoken of the danger of longer remaining there.

But the precipitate action of the two outlaws operated in Wells' favor, for as they rode forth the whole force of officers, with the exception of the sheriff and Burton Braham, made swiftly after them.

The wounded comrade of Jesse James, finding he had but two men to deal with, mounted his horse with some difficulty, and turned his head in a direc-

tion opposite to that taken by Shelford and his companion.

"He's going toward Randolph," shouted the sheriff, exultingly. "We've got him sure this time."

Wells answered by a jeering laugh, and then, putting spurs to his horse, went spinning down the road like another Dick Turpin.

Ping! ping! went the bullets, but none touched him.

Nearer and nearer to Randolph drew the fugitive, while nearer and nearer to Wells drew Burton Braham.

The sheriff bestrode a good animal, but the detective's was a thoroughbred, and an ex-racer.

But fifty feet lay between the pursuer and the pursued.

"Stop!" thundered Braham, as he cocked his pistol and prepared for close quarters, "stop or I'll pump you full of lead. You've got to the end of your tether, and you might as well give in."

Without turning his head, the desperate outlaw shoved the muzzle of a revolver over his right shoulder and fired.

The bullet whizzed past Braham's ear.

Crack! crack!

The detective dropped his pistol arm with a groan, and at the same moment Polk Wells reeled in his saddle.

The shot of each had taken effect.

But, while Braham suffered with a broken arm, his plucky antagonist had received a dangerous wound in the side.

The detective saw his quarry fall from his horse, and knew that the game was over.

* * * * *

At the next term of the Fremont County Court, Polk Wells, still suffering from his wounds, was placed on trial for the Riverton bank robbery, and, upon conviction, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment in the Fort Madison prison.

He was carried to the prison on a stretcher, and placed in the prison hospital, where he received such good care that his wounds rapidly healed.

Chloe and Mose "hitched teams" for life soon after the Blue Springs episode, and at present writing are employed on the old homestead, near Liberty, the property of Mrs. Burton Braham.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Send in your exchange notices, boys. We will publish them all in a special "Exchange Department."

ABOUT FAMOUS MEN.

Boys, turn to page 32 and see the announcement of the new Contest.

It's going to be a rattle, like the one that has just closed.

Everybody is to have another try at the valuable prizes offered. Don't miss this opportunity, but send in your article at once.

Following are some of the best articles received during the week.

Read them, and then send in your own!

A Brave Commander.

(By Edward W. Everson, Providence, R. I.)

I have read with interest the biographies which have appeared from time to time in the Weekly, but noticed that no one had selected the brave American whom I have decided to write about.

The fearless man of whom I speak was Stephen Decatur. Decatur was of Southern origin, having been born at Sinepuxent, Maryland.

He had a natural inclination to go to sea, as his father had followed that occupation, and so at the age of nineteen he became a midshipman.

At that time, America was challenging France's right to plunder our vessels; thus Decatur saw some service in defending that claim. He was promoted, after one year's service, to the office of lieutenant.

When Thomas Jefferson was elected President, one of his first acts was to send Commodore Dale, with a squadron, to the Mediterranean Sea, to put a stop to the piracy which the Barbary States indulged in. Many American ships had been plundered and the passengers and crews were sold as slaves or held for ransom.

The Enterprise, a twelve-gun schooner, of which Decatur was an officer, and the commander Lieutenant Sterrett, overtook a Tripolitan fourteen-gun ship, and in a running fight of three hours, during which Decatur distinguished himself for bravery, captured her after killing or wounding fifty of the corsairs, but without losing one of her own men.

But the most famous achievement of Decatur was executed in 1803. Tripoli still persisted in plundering our vessels, so Commodore Preble was sent to that vicinity with a squadron of seven vessels.

While chasing a Tripolitan vessel, the Philadelphia, commanded by Captain Bainbridge, ran ashore and was captured with all on board. The Pacha got her off, but Preble decided to destroy her. So Decatur, with a small vessel, ran in, captured her, and set her afire. And this was done under the fire of 144 guns! The vessel blazed up, making the city as bright as day, until her magazine was reached when, with a terrible explosion, she disappeared.

Nelson, in speaking of the exploit, said it was "the most daring act of the age."

For this piece of work Decatur was made captain in the following year.

In 1812 he again showed his fearless nature when he captured the British frigate Macedonian, but afterward he was surrounded by four frigates, and forced to surrender after the loss of one-fourth of his crew.

In 1815 he punished the Algerians and forced the beys of Algeria and Tunis and the pasha of Tripoli to pay damages to the United States for breaking their treaties.

Decatur did not live long after that. In a duel with Commander James Barron he was killed on March 22, 1820, at the age of forty-one.

In his short but brilliant career he showed himself to be a descendant of the spirit of '76," a pattern for all Americans.

The Bravery of Israel Putnam.

(By V. T. Levy, Pittsburg, Pa.)

If we would find some truly great men, we must look for them when the distress of the nation aroused her sons for her defense. Such a time was the period of the Revolution. Foremost among the many great men of that time was Israel Putnam, familiarly called "Old Put." He was born in Salem, Mass., in 1718. He was muscular, courageous and possessed an indomitable will.

As a boy he distinguished himself by killing a she wolf which had terrorized the country for miles around by its depredations. He crawled into its den, and shot the animal by the light of its own glaring eyes.

He distinguished himself in the French and Indian wars. At one time he was captured by the Indians, and was about to be burned at the stake. Then he showed his strength of purpose and his utter fearlessness of death, for he endured the torture without a murmur. Just as his limbs were scorching, and death seemed certain, he was saved by a French officer.

His noble generosity was shown while he was doing scout duty. At the imminent peril of his life he rescued a comrade who had been captured. He came out of the encounter with no fewer than fourteen bullet holes in his clothes. At Fort Edward when all the rest had fled, he alone fought back the flames which were separated by only a thin partition from the magazine where three hundred barrels of powder were stored. Expecting to be blown to pieces every moment, the undaunted hero kept up the fight and finally conquered the flames. He came out of the battle so burned that when he removed his gloves the skin came with them.

He superintended the construction of the fortifications of West Point and held many other important positions. His deeds of daring were many, and he was always ready to risk his life in a just cause. On one occasion, when hotly pursued by a band of British, he escaped, with a bullet hole in his hat, only by riding down such a steep declivity that the enemy did not dare to follow. The British offered him gold and the rank of major-general if he would desert the American cause, but the incorruptible patriot scorned their offers; he would not sacrifice his honor. Such is the story of the life of one of America's noblest sons.

Hunting and Trapping Department.

This department is brimful of information and ideas of interest to the young trapper and hunter. Write us if you have any questions to ask concerning these subjects, and they will be answered in a special column. Address all communications to the "Hunting and Trapping Department."

A Correspondent's Questions.

I have read with much interest every week the Trapping Department, which is certainly all right. Seeing in your department that all questions about hunting and trapping would be answered, I would be very much pleased to see an answer in the trapper's quiz column.

I am intending and have been for several years, to go up North and try my luck in the trapping line. I am used to the woods and roughing it, but am not very well informed in the trapping line, hence I eagerly read your columns.

I would like to learn what size of traps to use and methods of setting them for mink, muskrats and martens, also something about the methods of skinning—that is, to take the skins off without ripping up the back or stomach. Also, what size of a rifle to use.

London, Canada.

TRAPPER.

A good deal of the information you ask for will be found in recent numbers of the JESSE JAMES WEEKLY, especially No. 22, which contains some valuable hints on the points you mention.

So many questions similar to your own have been received, however, that we will answer all of your questions in this number.

The size of traps for muskrats is known as No. 1, and has jaws which spread four inches. It is especially designed for the capture of the mink, marten and animals of similar size.

As for setting the traps, much more is required than is generally supposed. The mere fact of a person's being able to set a trap cleverly and judiciously forms but a small part of his proficiency, and unless he enters deeper into the subject and learns something of the nature and habits of the animals he intends to catch, his traps will be set in vain, or at best meet with but indifferent success.

The sense of smell, so largely developed in many animals, becomes one of the trapper's most serious obstacles, and seems at times to amount almost to positive reason,

so perfectly do the creatures baffle the most ingenious attempts of man in his efforts to capture them.

In the art of trapping, the bait is often entirely dispensed with, the traps being set and carefully concealed in the runways of the various animals. These by-paths are easily detected by an experienced trapper, and are indicated either by footprints or other evidences of the animal, together with matted leaves and broken twigs and grasses.

Natural channels, such as hollow logs or crevices between rocks or fallen trees, offer excellent situations for steel traps.

The most effective baits used in the art of trapping are those which are used to attract the animal through its sense of smell, as distinct from that of its mere appetite for food. These baits are known in the profession as "medicine," or scent baits, and possess the most remarkable power of attracting the various animals from great distances, and leading them almost irresistibly to any desired spot. Such is the barkstone or castoreum, of such value in the capture of the beaver, and the oil of anise, so commonly used for the trapping of animals in general.

In all cases avoid handling the trap with the bare hand. Many an amateur has set and reset his traps in vain, and retired from the field of trapping in disgust, from the mere want of observing this rule. Animals of keen scent are quick in detecting the slightest odors, and that left by the touch of a human hand often suffices to drive the creature away from a trap which, under other circumstances, would have been its certain destruction. To be sure, the various scent baits already alluded to will in a measure overcome human traces, but not always effectually, and in order to insure success no precautions so simple should be neglected. A pair of clean buckskin gloves are valuable requisites to the trapper, and should always be "on hand" when setting or transporting traps.

As for skinning animals, this department of the trapper's art is one of the most important and necessary, as affecting pecuniary profits. The value of a skin in the

fur market depends entirely upon the care with which it is taken from the animal and afterward prepared, and without a knowledge on this subject the young trapper will in vain seek for high prices for his furs. Large quantities of valuable skins are sent to our markets annually by inexperienced amateur trappers, and in many cases rare and beautiful furs have been almost spoiled by want of care in skinning and curing. The rules are simple and easily followed, a little care being all that is necessary to insure most perfect success. In every case the skin should be removed shortly after death, or at least before it has become tainted with decay. Full directions were given in this department last week. We know of no way to skin animals without ripping up the back or stomach.

Great pains should be taken in skinning. Avoid the adherence of flesh or fat to the skin, and guard against cutting through the hide, as a pierced skin is much injured in value. The parts about the eyes, legs and ears should be carefully removed. In all cases the furs should be allowed to dry in a cool, airy place, free from the rays of the sun or the heat of a fire, and protected from rain.

Astringent preparations of various kinds are used by many trappers, but they are by no means necessary. The most common dressing consists of equal parts of rock salt and alum, dissolved in water. Into this a sufficient amount of coarse flour or wheat bran is stirred to give the mixture the consistency of batter, after which it is spread thickly over the skin and allowed to dry.

It is afterward scraped off, and in some cases a second application is made. This preparation is much used in dressing beaver, otter, mink and muskrat skins, but as many of our most successful and experienced trappers do without it, we fail to see the advantage of using it, as it is only an extra trouble. The simplest and surest way is to stretch the skin and to submit it to a gradual process of natural drying without any artificial heat or application of astringents to hasten the result.

A very common mode of stretching skins consists in tacking them to a board, with the fur inward, and allowing them to dry as already described.

This method does very well for small skins, but for general purposes the "stretchers" are the only means by which a pelt may be properly cured and prepared.

Turtles as Pets.

Although the turtle cannot by any means be called an interesting pet, many boys like to keep one of these little creatures. Their only recommendation is that they require but little attention. In the spring a turtle should be turned out into a garden where there are suc-

culent plants, such as cabbages, lettuce, etc., and where it will look after itself through the whole spring and summer. As the cold weather comes on the turtle will seek out a warm corner, and burrow under a heap and hibernate there until the spring comes round again.

Turtles live to a very old age. There is one we heard of which is said to be considerably over a hundred years old.

The Hero of the Alamo.

(By Jess Foster, Denison, Texas.)

William Travis was born in North Carolina. In his early life he taught school, and while engaged in teaching school he studied law. He was married at the age of twenty-six, and was only twenty-eight when he met his terrible fate at the Alamo.

On the 28th of February, 1836, he wrote to the people in Texas that he was besieged by a thousand or more Mexicans under Santa Anna.

Santa Anna demanded a "surrender at discretion," or that the garrison would be put to the sword when taken, and Travis answered his summons with a cannon shot and said, "I will never surrender or retreat."

Just before the battle Travis asked all who were willing to die for Texas to cross the line to him, which he had drawn with his sword, and there wasn't a man that stayed on the other side. On the sixth day of March, 1836, the Mexicans made their final attack, and when they had murdered every Texan they rifled their bodies of everything they had and piled their bodies up and partly burned them, thus wreaking their inhuman vengeance upon the dead.

NOTICE TO READERS.

Our readers have noticed that from No. 21 we have used the same general title for this series, which will be continued for about thirteen issues, when a new title will be used for another series of "Jesse James" stories equally absorbing; and this plan will be continued indefinitely. We believe our readers will welcome this change as an improvement, since we can thus avoid any duplicates in titles or the use of any title bearing a similarity to others. Of course each issue will be numbered differently in rotation, as heretofore, and also bear upon its cover a different picture illustrating some important incident in the story which clearly distinguishes one issue from another.

The stories are really issued in the same manner as heretofore, except that one title is used for a number of them.

All Aboard for the New Contest!

THE DEEDS OF FAMOUS MEN!

HERE IS THE PLAN:

Look up what interesting facts you can about any famous American—living or dead.

Chose anybody you please—Washington or Lincoln, Paul Revere, or General Grant, "Bob" Evans or Admiral Sampson, or anybody else you want to write about. Then sit down and write an article about him. Tell all about him, the brave deeds he did, or the famous words he uttered, etc.

All of the best articles will be published during the progress of the contest in a special department of the JESSE JAMES WEEKLY.

No contribution must be longer than 500 words.

REMEMBER:

Whether your contribution wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with the name of the writer.

CAMERAS, MAGIC LANTERNS, PENKNIVES AND PUZZLES GIVEN AWAY:

The two who send us the most interesting and best-written articles will each receive a first-class Camera, complete with achromatic lens, and loaded with six exposures each. Absolutely ready for use. For square pictures, 3 1-2 x 3 1-2 inches; capacity, six exposures without reloading; size of camera, 4 1-2 x 4 1-2 x 4 inches; weight, 15 ounces; well made, covered with grain leather and handsomely finished.

The five who send us the next best articles will each receive a "Sterling" Magic Lantern Outfit, together with 72 admission tickets and a large show bill. Each lantern is 10 inches high, 4 inches in diameter, with a 1 1-2 inch plano-complex condensing lens and a 3-4 inch double complex objective lens. Uses kerosene oil only.

The five who send us the next best articles will each receive a Handsome Pearl-Handled Knife. These knives have each four blades of the best English steel, hardened and tempered. The handle is pearl, the lining brass, and the bolsters German silver.

For ten next best descriptions, ten sets of the latest and most entertaining Puzzles and Novelties on the market, numbering three puzzles each, including Uncle Isaac's Pawnshop Puzzle, the Magic Marble Puzzle, and the Demon Outfit.

To become a contestant for the prizes you must cut out the Character Contest Coupon, printed herewith. Fill it out properly and send it to JESSE JAMES WEEKLY, care of Street & Smith, 238 William Street, New York City, together with your article. No contribution will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

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THE celebrated Diamond Dick stories can only be found in "Diamond Dick, Jr., the Boys' Best Weekly." Diamond Dick and his son Bertie are the most unique and fascinating heroes of Western romance. The scenes, and many of the incidents, in these exciting stories are taken from real life. Diamond Dick stories are conceded to be the best stories of the West, and are all copyrighted by us. The weekly is the same size and price as this publication, with handsome illuminated cover. Price, five cents.

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